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COMMENT

AND THE BEST CARS OF THE PAST 25 YEARS ARE…

Each issue of Autocar is fun to put together, but this special one, celebrating the past 25 years of the automotive landscape, has been a particular highlight. Just think of all the exceptional cars of the 21st century! As we explain from p47, choosing just one car from each year was debate-inducing to say the least, and it served to demonstrate the diversity of opinion and different priorities when making such decisions.

There was also plenty of 'discussion' when six of us gathered with our own personal take on an era-defining car. Picking these cars was an enjoyable headache, given that the brief was to choose the most seminal rather than our favourite.

Anyway, what struck me was the diversity of cars produced over the past 25 years, showcasing the necessity for many different types of motors for many different people – to suit their needs but also their wants.

It's easy to be despondent about a world of homogenised cars, Russian-doll design and electric powertrains, but there will always be a breadth of people desiring different cars – and manufacturers determined to produce them. And that ensures the future is bright for the car industry and us buyers.

We would love to hear your thoughts on the 21st century's most significant cars. Do let us know.

Rachel Burgess, magazine editor
rachel.burgess@haymarket.com

Meanwhile, online…

autocar.co.uk

Testarossa is back!

SF90 successor has more power than any series-production Ferrari yet, plus a 0-62mph time of 2.35sec. Check it out on our Insta.

Say hello to Sid

Meet Lotus's long-forgotten 'structure, isolation and dynamics' prototype, which had MG Metro 6R4 power and leant into bends.

Honda CR-Z: a hidden gem

It's often overlooked but it turns heads, has rock-solid reliability, was tuned by a drift legend, does 50mpg and is priced from £2000.

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"Who is pottier: the people taking part or me driving 150 miles to watch them do it?" p76

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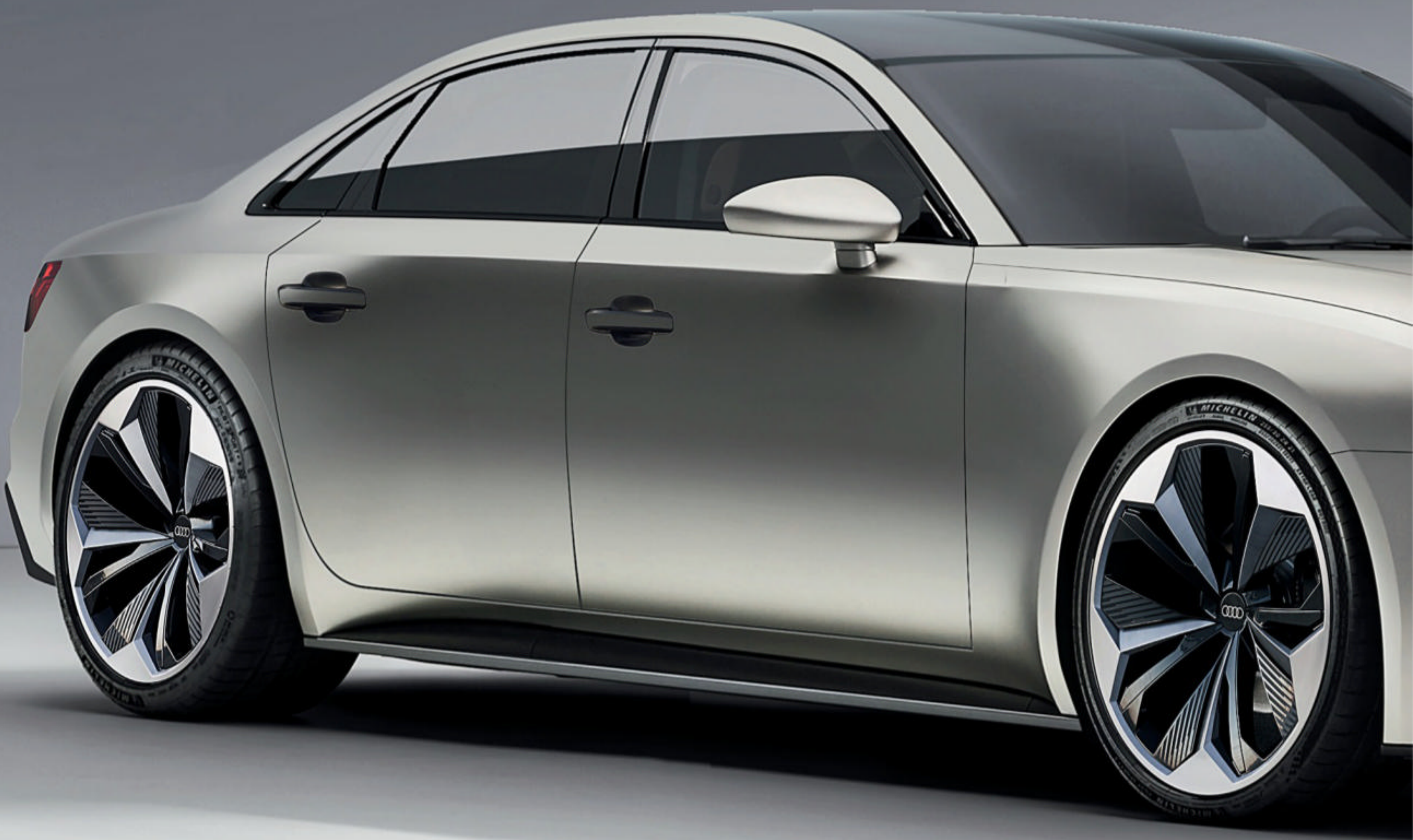
GOT A STORY Email our news editor
will.rimell@haymarket.com

AUDI A4 TO BECOME NEXT-LEVEL EV AS RIVALRY HOTS UP

Compact exec EV will harness game-changing tech and new-era looks



Audi is preparing to battle the electric BMW 3 Series and Mercedes-Benz C-Class with a radical new take on the A4 that is due to go on sale in three years with a game-changing new platform, next-level software and a striking new look inspired by the TT.

Set to be one of the first production cars designed according to the 'Radical Next' design philosophy, as previewed by Audi's Concept C sports car, the A4 E-tron will play a crucial role in the firm's shift to becoming a manufacturer of electric software-defined vehicles. The move is part of a completely new strategy aimed at sparking global growth and defending the brand's market share from rivals old and new.

Development of the new electric A4 was confirmed to Autocar by Audi CEO Gernot Döllner, who said the exec EV's launch will form part of "the biggest change in the history of the company", as Audi seeks to "completely rebuild" its product line-up, design language, corporate structure and strategic outlook.

AUTOCAR
IMAGE

Rival electric C-Class EQ will arrive next year with a range of 497 miles

Already, the firm has reversed its polarising model naming strategy, pledged to cull its least profitable model lines and axed thousands of jobs as part of a global cost-cutting drive in response to a dramatic decline in

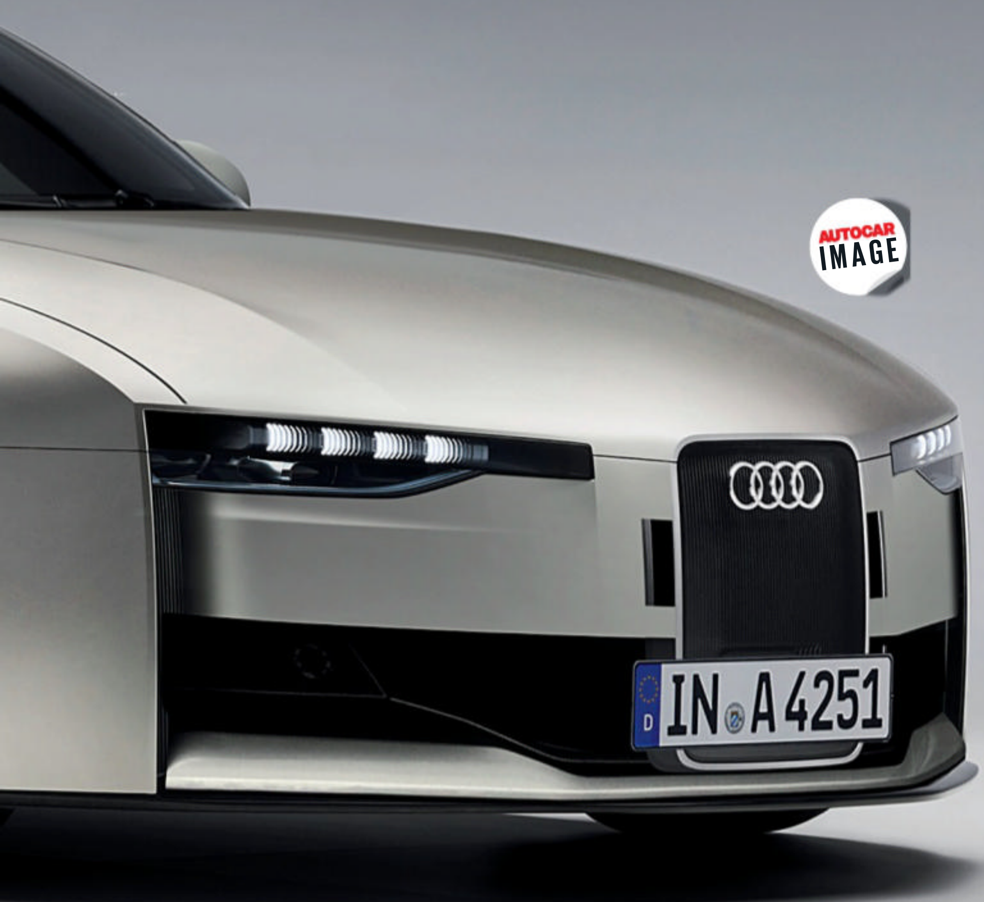
WILL AUDI TURN TO RANGE-EXTENDERS?

Although it has been engineered primarily for pure-electric cars, the SSP architecture can accommodate a combustion engine for use as a range-extender – as showcased in the Cupra Tindaya, which is said to be capable of 620 miles between fill-ups.

Audi CEO Gernot Döllner said the German firm is also "investigating range-extenders and their opportunities" but was sceptical about their prospects in Audi's home market. He said: "For Europe, I don't see range-extenders as a necessary solution. The charging infrastructure – at least in France, the UK and Germany – will be excellent over the next few years, and the distances are not that big.

"You don't need a range-extender with battery-electric vehicles going way above 500km [320 miles] and then only having a 15- to 20-minute charging stop."

SSP-based Cupra Tindaya uses range-extender technology



"A4 E-tron's launch will form part of the 'biggest change in Audi history'"

deliveries and rising costs – and in anticipation of stormier seas ahead.

Döllner said he is "always optimistic" about the company's prospects but added that he "would not have expected 2025 to be as tough as it is", with the new US import tariffs and slow global EV demand weighing heavily on the company's performance – placing all the more importance on upcoming models like the A4.

"I'm quite positive looking [ahead] to the next years, with a completed model line-up by the end of 2026," he said, pledging that "more interesting products" will come from then on, as the brand works to "introduce Radical Next design to the Audi line-up".

RADICAL A4 E-TRON

Audi is thought to have been developing an electric A4 for some years, but bosses have never officially confirmed plans to launch an EV version of one of its most popular and best-known models – until now.

Asked whether the imminent arrival of radical new electric executive saloons from Audi's biggest rivals makes an A4 E-tron a necessity, Döllner said: "We have the A6 E-tron that's positioned in a 'middle segment' and addresses a lot of customers from the A4 segment – but you're right that an electric A4 is definitely a focus field for Audi."

He added cryptically that "it will be a future Audi car on a future platform", later confirming that the architecture, specifically, will be the new SSP skateboard that will be rolled out across the whole Volkswagen Group.

This means it won't be launched before 2028, which is when that new platform will start to underpin production cars from all Volkswagen Group brands – including the next Volkswagen Golf and Skoda Octavia, and a new flagship Cupra SUV based on the recently revealed Tindaya concept.

It also means the electric A4 will be largely technically unrelated to the existing A6 E-tron, which uses the PPE platform that Audi developed in collaboration with Porsche.

Originally, it was expected that the two executive models would be largely identical under the skin – as has always been the case with the ICE-powered A4 and A6. But moving onto the newer hardware will enable the A4 EV to better compete with the electric 3 Series and C-Class, which will also use their respective manufacturers' highly advanced new architectures.

No VW Group brand has given explicit details about their engineering targets for SSP-based cars, so it's not yet clear exactly how far the A4 E-tron will move the game on in terms of performance. But the upcoming C-Class and 3 Series EVs will have roughly 500-mile ranges, the ability to charge at more than 300kW and four-wheel-drive range-toppers with power outputs in the mid-400s, so expect the Audi to be comparably specified.

BMW's i3 EV, also due in 2026, will bring a new look and 500-mile range

AUDI'S RIVIAN-POWERED NEW ERA

Beyond its raw technical capabilities, SSP is ▸

A4 E-tron will be technically unrelated to today's ICE A5 (pictured)

◄ important for the step-change it will bring in computing capabilities, with Audi preparing to use the platform as the basis for its first cars with a software stack developed by Volkswagen Group technical partner Rivian.

The Volkswagen ID 1, due for launch in 2027, will be the first production car to use Rivian elements, but Audi will be the first Volkswagen Group brand to bring cars to market with a complete software architecture developed in partnership with the Californian outfit – and the electric A4 is highly likely to be one of them.

That's because "Audi has the highest requirements when it comes to functionality", said Döllner. In addition, the heightened efficiencies and reduced complexity brought by the new technology will tie into the German brand's push for clearer and simpler operations.

"It's 2028 when we'll see [the Rivian software] in the market. We are heavily working on it with the Rivian-Volkswagen joint venture, building up mules right now and working intensively together, so the first cars are already on their way," Döllner told Autocar.

He revealed that the technology will be introduced in a pair of all-new cars – "if you take a step like that, you do it in a new platform" – which will occupy different market segments.

"From there, we'll roll it out from these two models, step by step, to the complete line-up," said Döllner.

He gave no clues to what these first two models will be but said the Rivian stack will have significant implications for the production and capabilities of next-generation Audis.

"It means for us, first of all, reducing complexity," he said. "In developing the car, we will have much leaner and faster processes in the way we develop the car.

"Over-the-air updates are an integral part of that strategy, so we are more flexible to add functionality or to fix things that are maybe imperfect, and it also helps us to focus our organisation: that software-defined architecture also brings complexity reduction."

CONCEPT C SETS THE TONE

Audi's development of a new software-defined family of vehicles comes as it renews its focus on traditional physical controls in pursuit of greater usability – as demonstrated by the new Concept C show car.

The two approaches would seem at odds with each other, but Döllner said digital and analogue elements "fit together perfectly".

He added: "You have less virtual buttons in the car and more haptic elements, because that's definitely the customer requirement we get from the market: customers want to have specific functions and direct access. And it gives us the ability to bring back materiality to the interior of the car – that real metal feeling, the 'Audi click', so also emotion.

"But underneath it's a central computer unit with zonal computers behind, so that's no contradiction. It fits together."

As well as being a complete departure from today's ICE-powered A5 (which replaced the previous A4) underneath, the new EV will be strikingly distinguished by bodywork that's inspired by Audi's brand-shaping new Concept C show car (itself due in production in 2027).

Defining features will be a new, vertically oriented, rectangular grille, slimline LED light clusters with Audi's four-ring emblem echoed in the signatures and a minimalist, monolithic silhouette that majors on aerodynamic efficiency.
FELIX PAGE

Concept C, due to enter production in 2027, will set tone for A4 E-tron

Audi's new luxury 4x4 will also adopt styling cues from the Concept C

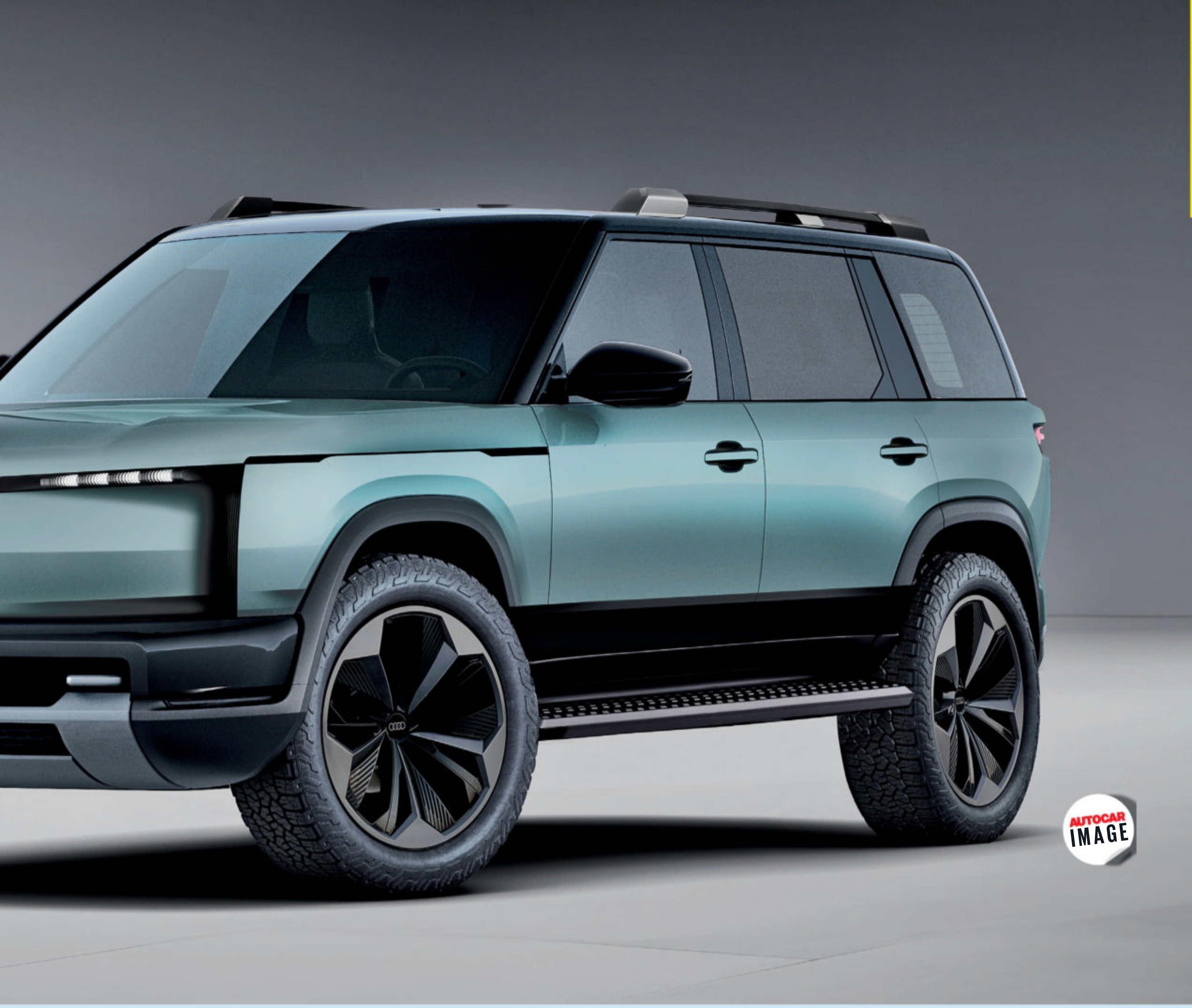
AUDI TO GUN FOR DEFENDER WITH ALL-NEW LUXURY 4x4 FLAGSHIP

AUDI IS SET to cap its new-era line-up with a rugged, luxurious SUV in the mould of the Land Rover Defender and Mercedes-Benz G-Class as a halo model that will introduce radical new design and technology features to its more mainstream siblings.

It first emerged that Audi was considering a flagship 4x4 model line in 2023, when then design boss Marc Lichte suggested such a model would build neatly on the brand's legacy of Quattro off-road models and tap into a highly profitable part of the market in which Audi was unrepresented.

"There is potential because there are only two premium players" in the luxury 4x4 segment (Mercedes-Benz and Land Rover), he said, "and I think there is a space for a third one".

Lichte left Audi shortly after but was replaced by ex-JLR designer Massimo Frascella, whose role of shaping the Defender in his previous job reinforced speculation that Audi was gearing up to launch a similar car – and now Audi boss Gernot Döllner has



hinted that an unveiling is on the horizon.

Asked whether the 4x4 was still a live project, he told Autocar: "Stay tuned."

Launching a relatively low-volume model would seem at odds with Döllner's wider objective to simplify the Audi line-up, but he said it remains important to have flagship cars that serve as technology showcases for the brand and can influence other models as well.

He said: "There is no niche banner. It's just the opposite. It works perfectly to have a more focused line-up in the core, and in addition to that have some niche models to build the brand and to also transfer new ideas from a niche segment into the core products. That works perfectly and this is part of our strategy."

On the potential for a Defender-rivalling Audi 4x4, he said: "Don't give up on that dream."

Previously, it was thought that Audi's luxury 4x4 could be aligned with the similarly conceived debut models from new Volkswagen Group electric brand Scout – the Traveler SUV and Terra pick-up – and built alongside them at the company's new US factory in South Carolina.

"Audi boss Gernot Döllner has hinted that an unveiling is on the horizon"

G-Class and Defender are the only real rivals to a luxury Audi off-roader

Döllner told Autocar that the US's new import tariffs have prompted the brand to consider building cars locally there, and this new 4x4 would seem a viable candidate for US production, given the popularity of such cars in the US.

"At a group level, we are right now discussing and investigating whether or not we should have a factory for Audi in the US," he said. "But that's dependent on a stable tariff situation and also on other regulatory boundary conditions that we would need to take [into consideration for] a decision like that."

He added that it could be "logical" to build Audi models in an existing VW Group facility in the US – including the Scout plant – but said: "The big question is if we want to have a specific Audi factory or not, and that decision is absolutely open and dependent on how we are we aligned with the US government."

AMG SETS ITS SIGHTS ON ELECTRIC TWO-DOOR GT

"Emotionally we should do it," says CEO, but market might not be ready

Mercedes-AMG is exploring an electric version of its GT sports coupé – but the performance brand's boss has said it will need to "justify the investment".

AMG has already confirmed that an electric GT 4-Door Coupé will arrive next year, previewed by the GT XX concept. The saloon will be the first car to sit on the 800V AMG.EA platform, which will also be used for AMG's incoming electric super-SUV, due in 2027.

Now CEO Michael Schiebe has said work is under way to see if an electric version of the two-door GT is viable.

"There is an emotional discussion and a rational discussion," said Schiebe at the recent Munich motor show. "Emotionally, yes, we should do that. The question is whether there is a market that is big enough to justify the investment that is necessary. At least from a technology point of view, we know how to do that."

A key focus for AMG is which customers the car will target. The combustion-engined GT (now sold as a pure petrol or a plug-in hybrid) is currently bought mainly as a second car for "those who love driving", so the EV would need to focus on that too, said Schiebe.

Future of Mk2 ICE GT is safe no matter what happens on EV side

However, he said AMG doesn't have a timeframe for bringing the GT EV to market and is "flexible" on a launch date – for example, it could be sooner rather than later if interest in electric performance cars suddenly starts to spike over the next few years.

He explained: "We are at the moment trying to understand what's going on in the market. And then we define the target picture of that very specific car."

Schiebe said that if the GT EV does get approved, it will be sold alongside the ICE GT, which AMG will "continue to invest in" well into the next decade.

"I would say we are very successful with our combustion-engined GT two-door," he said. "So we will focus on that first and then let's see when the right point and time is there to launch a two-door EV.

"We want to be in terms of technology and performance successful but also economically successful. We do whatever

AUTOCAR IMAGE

> “Sometimes you make a car which is not the most profitable, because it’s so important for the brand”

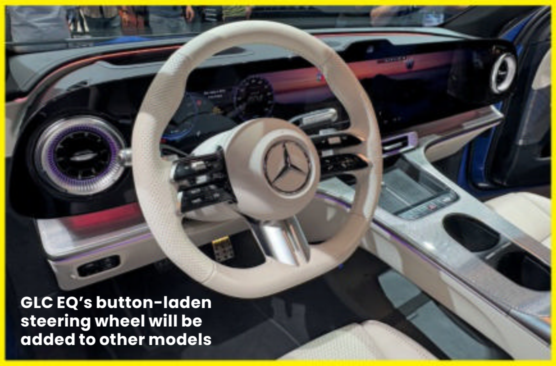
AMG has begun testing new electric GT 4-Door Coupé on public roads

is, let’s say, worth investing the money into.

“At the moment, I would say we are more successful investing into our two-door combustion-engined platform than doing this on the electric side. But here we are flexible, so flexible because we are constantly reviewing our portfolio and looking into that.”

If a justification for the GT EV can’t be found, Schiebe hinted that AMG might bring it to market regardless: “Sometimes you make a car which is not the most profitable one, but you do it because it’s so important for the brand, and you need to do it because it’s a brand-shaper.”

WILL RIMELL



GLC EQ’s button-laden steering wheel will be added to other models

SWITCHGEAR WILL RETURN TO MERCEDES CABINS

MERCEDES-BENZ WILL begin to reintegrate more physical controls into its cabins, because “the data shows us physical buttons are better”, its software boss Magnus Östberg has told Autocar.

The move has already started with the new GLC EQ SUV and CLA Shooting Brake, which both feature a host of rockers, rollers and buttons on a newly designed steering wheel.

This wheel will be used in Mercedes’ future models, and the plan is also to fit it to all of those already on sale, starting with the CLA saloon.

This, said Östberg, is the easiest and most cost-efficient way of adding physical controls to cars that are already on sale while still keeping Mercedes’ digital-first cabin designs.

He explained: “You can see a difference from the CLA [saloon], which has a touchscreen and fewer hard buttons, to the [new] GLC, where we put back the rollers and buttons, because we see in the data [from drivers of our connected cars] that these are very important.

“So having that balance between physical buttons and the touch is extremely important for us. We’re completely data-driven: the data shows physical buttons are better, and that’s why we put them back in.”

Östberg said Mercedes is also looking at adding more physical controls elsewhere in the cabin for future models – but this will most likely apply only to SUVs, because “in larger cars we have more freedom to package”.

MERCEDES GIVES V12 STAY OF EXECUTION

Mercedes-Benz will continue to offer V12 engines into the next decade, its technology boss has confirmed.

The impending arrival of new European emission laws, named Euro 7, at the end of next year had put the German company’s largest combustion engine into doubt.

But, speaking at the recent Munich motor show, Markus Schäfer confirmed that Mercedes “will continue to offer V12s”.

When asked if the V12 is Euro 7-compatible, he replied “I will not say more, but it is coming”, suggesting European sales will continue.

Schäfer did not, however, give any details on how Mercedes would bring the engine up to the new standards, or which model lines would use it.

Currently, the only Mercedes model to use the V12 is the ultra-exclusive, 603bhp Maybach S680 limousine, but it was previously offered in AMG’s S65, CL 65 and SL 65 models.

KIA'S PETROL K4 TO TARGET GOLF IN UK BY END OF YEAR

New family hatch replaces Ceed – and an estate looks likely to follow

Kia has confirmed UK specifications for its new K4 hatchback, a Volkswagen Golf rival that will fill the gap left by the recently axed Ceed.

As first reported by Autocar, the K4 will arrive in UK showrooms by the end of this year.

It will be offered initially with a choice of 1.0-litre and 1.6-litre turbocharged petrol engines, with an additional hybrid powertrain due next year.

The entry-level unit produces 113bhp and can be paired with either a six-speed manual or a seven-speed dual-clutch automatic gearbox.

The 1.6-litre engine, offered in 148bhp and 178bhp guises, is available exclusively with the seven-speed automatic.

Inside, the K4 draws heavily on the Kia EV4 (First Drive, p26), with a large dashboard-mounted display that integrates two 12.3in screens – one for instrumentation and the other for the infotainment system – into one panel.

Wireless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto smartphone connectivity are included as standard and there are physical switches for essential functions, such as the climate control temperature and fan speed, audio volume and hazard lights.

Kia claims the K4 majors on practicality, having been designed to maximise rear leg room and with a high roofline for generous head room. Boot space measures 438 litres.

Prices have yet to be confirmed, but the Xceed crossover – the last surviving variant of the Ceed – costs £25,165, while the rival Golf starts at £28,150. The entry-level K4 is expected to sit somewhere between the two.

Whereas the Ceed was built in Slovakia, the K4 will be built in Mexico. This is because the new EV4 hatchback has already taken the Ceed's place at the Zilina production facility.

The K4 saloon, which is offered in the US, is unlikely to be sold in the UK or mainland Europe, given the dwindling demand for the body shape. However, an estate version has previously been spotted testing in Germany, suggesting a rival for the Toyota Corolla, Vauxhall Astra and Peugeot 308 estates could be on the cards.

The arrival of the K4 hatchback represents Kia redoubling its efforts in the C-segment as it chases market share given up by rivals such as Ford, which will end production of the Focus in November.

Ted Lee, Kia's executive vice-president, told Autocar earlier this year that there was still "big volume" for such models in Europe.
CHARLIE MARTIN

"It will be offered initially with 1.0-litre and 1.6-litre turbo petrols"

OFFICIAL PICTURE

JLR STILL SUFFERING FALLOUT FROM CYBER ATTACK

JLR stopped production after suffering a cyber attack on 1 September

JLR IS DUE to restart car production today (24 September), following almost a month of global production, retailer and workshop issues caused by a cyber attack on 1 September.

Since the attack, the company has been rebuilding its internal computer systems, which were infiltrated by hackers.

This has resulted in production shutdowns at all of JLR's global plants, which means no cars have been built since 1 September.

The effect could be costing JLR up to £5 million a day, business economics professor David Bailey has told Autocar.

Since the cyber attack, the majority of JLR staff and those employed in

NISSAN DESIGN HIT BY CUTS

Nissan will downsize its design studios in London and Japan and close others in California and São Paulo as part of a plan to cut annual costs by £1.3bn. It isn't yet known how many design jobs will go.

SPAIN PLANT FOR LEAPMOTOR

Leapmotor will build cars in Spain, backer Stellantis has confirmed. Reports suggest it will be at the Zaragoza plant, which builds Peugeot's 208 and its siblings. The 2026 B10 crossover is likely to be the first.

Ceed was axed by Kia last month; gap will be filled by new K4

K4 saloon is sold in the US but isn't expected to be offered in Europe

the related supply chain have been off work.

As a result, workers' union Unite has called on the UK government to set up a furlough scheme.

This is with a particular emphasis on the supply chain. Unite claims that employers are putting workers on reduced or zero-hours contracts and telling them to apply for Universal Credit.

Earlier reports have suggested that some suppliers "will go bust" as a result of the ongoing issues at JLR.

"Workers in the JLR supply chain must not be made to pay the price for the cyber attack," said Unite general secretary Sharon Graham. "It is the government's responsibility to protect jobs and industries that are a vital part of the economy."

Cologne plant, which builds the Explorer and Capri, is running well below capacity

EV SLOWDOWN FORCES FORD TO AXE ANOTHER 1000 JOBS

FORD WILL CUT up to 1000 jobs at its electric car factory in Cologne, Germany, in response to lower than expected EV demand across Europe.

The former home of the Fiesta, which now builds the Explorer and Capri following a £730 million revamp, is operating far below its capacity.

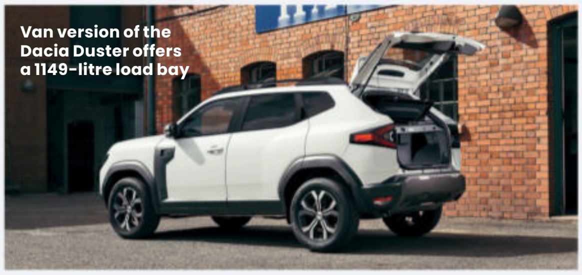
It can produce up to 250,000 cars per year yet, according to figures from industry body Jato Dynamics, Ford sold fewer than 19,000 Explorers and far fewer Capris in Europe during the first half of 2025.

In response, Ford is slashing its German workforce again, having axed 2900 roles in the country late last year as part of a dramatic 14% reduction of its European staff levels in response to slow EV sales.

In a statement sent to Autocar, the company said: "Ford is continuously evaluating its production volumes and making adjustments to its manufacturing schedule based on market demand. In Europe, demand for electric passenger vehicles continues to be significantly below industry projections. As a result, Ford will adjust production at the Cologne plant to a single shift operation beginning in January 2026."

Ford hasn't said how many workers will remain at Cologne. Before the last round of cuts in November 2024, around 11,500 people were understood to be employed there.

DUSTER AND RENAULT 4 GET VAN REVAMP



Van version of the Dacia Duster offers a 1149-litre load bay

The Renault Group has launched a pair of car-based vans – the Dacia Duster Cargo and the Renault 4 Van.

Each trades its rear seats for a flat cargo floor, achieving load capacities of 1149 litres in the Duster and 1045 litres in the 4.

The Duster can be had as a four-wheel-drive 128bhp mild hybrid or front-wheel-drive 153bhp full hybrid.

The electric 4 features either a 40kWh battery and 118bhp motor for a 119-mile range or a 148bhp motor with a 52kWh pack that results in a 254-mile range.

Pricing, excluding VAT, starts at £22,995 for the Duster. Meanwhile, the 4 – which is not yet confirmed for UK sale – costs around £25,000 in its native France.

In the UK, only a handful of car-derived vans remain on sale.

Renault 4 also ditches its rear seats to make a 1045-litre van

GEELY EX5 PRICED FROM £32K

Incoming brand Geely is targeting the Skoda Enyaq with its EX5. Landing in the UK next month at £31,990, the electric SUV has a 60.2kWh battery, a front-mounted 215bhp motor and 267 miles of range.

NEW LOTUS ELISE... KINDA

The Lotus Elise S1 has been reimagined as a 600kg supercar with a single, central seat. Created by UK firm Analogue Automotive, the VHPK restomod features a power-to-weight ratio in excess of 400bhp per tonne.

“Their argument rests on their claim that insurers are now more likely to write off damaged cars”

WHY GAP INSURANCE IS ‘VITAL SAFEGUARD’ FOR CAR OWNERS

Despite ‘fair value’ concerns, providers say it offers essential protection

Guaranteed asset protection (Gap) is being hailed as a “vital safeguard” against financial ruin, just 18 months after the Financial Conduct Authority requested that insurers stop selling it.

Gap insurance covers the difference between a car’s purchase price or the amount of finance owed on it and its current market value in the event that the car is written off before the finance has been repaid.

In February 2024, the FCA said it was concerned such products were failing to provide fair value to consumers, with only 6% of the amount they were paying in premiums being paid out in claims. Further, the FCA said it had seen examples of some firms paying out as much as 70% of the value of insurance premiums in commission to parties involved in selling Gap insurance policies.

Three months later, in May 2024, the FCA announced that firms that had reduced their commission payouts had been permitted to restart sales of Gap insurance.

Today, with Gap insurance once again freely available, companies selling such cover say that car buyers can’t afford not to have it.

Their argument rests on their claim that insurers are now more likely to write off damaged cars, owing to the rising costs of repairing them and the current dearth of, and difficulty in obtaining, spare parts. With depreciation eroding used car values and thereby reducing the settlement sums paid by insurers and new cars becoming more expensive, motorists who have finance balances to clear and more money to find for their next car risk being seriously out of

AN EXPERT’S VIEW ON GAP INSURANCE

Gap insurance has a reputation for benefiting dealers rather than their customers, resulting from high-pressure sales tactics and the FCA’s verdict that it wasn’t delivering fair value. However, Tim Kelly, founder of independent consumer advocate Motor Claim Guru, believes it’s essential at present.

“Anyone who takes out finance on a car should take out Gap insurance,” he said. “For example, a car on a PCP belongs to the finance company, who, in the event that it is written off, will want its money back. Without Gap cover, that cost is down to the motorist, who will also have to find the money for a replacement car.”

At the same time, Kelly accuses insurers of being too keen to write off cars unnecessarily: “The owner is entitled to demand the insurer repairs their car up to its market value. Writing it off could cause an owner ‘foreseeable harm’, which insurers are not permitted to do.”

pocket. This also applies in the case of stolen cars.

Motoreasy – a company that sells Gap insurance, charging around £192 for a three-year policy – says its average claims payout has more than tripled in three years, from £1587 in 2021 to £5559 in 2024. For electric vehicles, some of which can lose up to 60% of their value in two years, Motoreasy says its payouts have exceeded £20,000.

Founder Duncan McClure Fisher said: "Our findings underscore the growing financial risks faced by car owners due to rapid vehicle depreciation, rising new car costs, spare parts shortages leading to insurance write-offs and a surge in vehicle theft. The combination of so many influential factors has created a perfect storm, where Gap insurance is no longer just a nice-to-have but an increasingly vital financial safeguard."

JOHN EVANS

VAUXHALL PLANS TO REPOSITION AS SPORTIER BRAND

Current ICE Corsa will live on beside all-new Corsa EV

VAUXHALL WILL BECOME a sportier brand within the Stellantis stable in its next generation of models, starting with the new Corsa supermini.

Stellantis Europe boss Jean-Philippe Imparato said the recent Corsa GSE Vision Gran Turismo concept showed the initial thinking behind taking Stellantis's brands into more "white space" and moving further away from one another – Vauxhall's white space being sportiness.

Building on Imparato's comments at the recent Munich motor show, Opel and Vauxhall CEO Florian Huettl told Autocar the concept was "a great illustration of what we are working on for the next step" of the brand and for Vauxhall that was about "sportiness" while ensuring the brand still makes cars that are "approachable and affordable".

A further expression of the brand's move towards sportier cars was seen with the introduction of the new Mokka GSE at the Munich show, said Huettl.

Huettl confirmed development work had begun on the next Corsa, and a launch in 2027 is considered likely for the supermini, at a price Huettl confirmed would be around €25,000 (£21,500).

The next Corsa will be based on Stellantis's new STLA Small platform, rather than the cost-saving Smart Car platform, because it's a more mature product in need of larger batteries. To that end, it will be offered only as an EV.

Huettl said it was no longer Vauxhall's intention to only offer electric cars from 2028, as previously planned.

While the next Corsa will be sold exclusively as an EV, today's ICE Corsa is likely to stay in production alongside the new model so that Vauxhall is able to cater for that market.

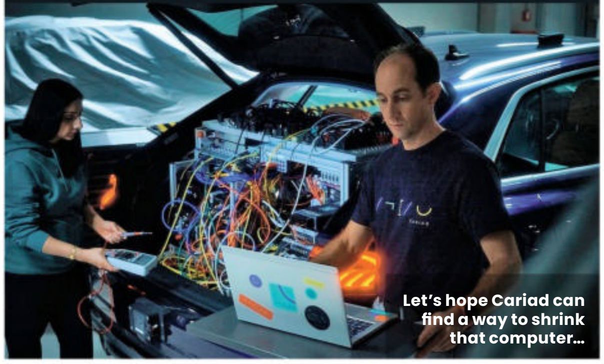
More broadly on the next Corsa, Huettl said a new approach will be taken to the interior design to try to get a greater feeling of space and light in the cabin.

While there will be a focus on driving dynamics and roadholding with the new Corsa as part of Vauxhall's sporty push, that doesn't extend to the by-wire steering that sibling brand Peugeot is preparing for its related next-generation 208.

Wild 789bhp GSE Vision concept shows where Vauxhall is heading

Next big thing

JESSE CROSSE



Let's hope Cariad can find a way to shrink that computer...

MEET YOUR NEW DRIVER: ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

IT'S HARD TO read anything these days without coming across the term 'artificial intelligence' or 'AI', and there's certainly plenty of noise being made about it in the automotive industry.

One huge investment in AI is being made by supplier Bosch and the Volkswagen Group's software arm, Cariad. These partners formed the Automated Driving Alliance in 2022 to develop autonomous systems at level two (hands-free driving on urban roads, highways and rural roads) and level three (total control on highways).

But is AI just one thing, or are there different types of it? It's widely known that AI can be used for generating content such as text, images and videos, but on a deeper level it can be used to analyse vast amounts of technical data more accurately and effectively than conventional methods. For example, engineers can use it to vastly speed up the analysis of test data collected on proving grounds during the development of a new car.

Bosch and Cariad are working to develop autonomous systems that will eventually be capable of acting "as naturally as the human driver".

They are using an "AI-based software stack" that is currently being tested on vehicle fleets and should be ready for production by the middle of 2026.

To replace a human driver in all circumstances, a system will need to be able to analyse situations, reason and take critical decisions as well as perform basic tasks, such as knowing its precise location and which side of the road to drive on. Bosch says its software stack will handle "all the essential cognitive tasks of perception, interpretation, decision-making and action".

The key word there is 'cognitive', meaning to learn and understand through experience and the senses – in other words, a car that can think and make its own decisions. Ultimately, for any being or machine piloting a car, that's essential.

The current level of software lays a basis for that, with the possibility of integrating 'vision-language-action' approaches that can imitate human logical thinking and action. That step would allow a machine to understand more complex traffic situations, such as assessing hidden risks in the same way a human driver might do.

Before that, in the near term, Bosch says its AI software stack will make automated driving at levels two and three more robust. Its performance will be improved by continuously feeding in enormous amounts of data that AI is so good at consuming.

The software architecture is being designed in such a way that the AI's decisions and actions remain safe, traceable and explainable, so that means it must also be accountable.

AI-driven autonomous VWs are testing on public roads

R2 is due to enter production in 2026 at Rivian's Illinois factory

'ASPIRATIONAL BUT ATTAINABLE' RIVIAN EVs CONFIRMED FOR UK

American firm created the Model Y-rivalling R2 SUV with Europe in mind

Rivian is planning a UK launch as part of an expansion into Europe and will offer its upcoming R2 SUV in right-hand drive.

To date, the US firm has operated only in North America with two electric models: the near-£60,000 R1S SUV and the related R1T pick-up truck.

But last year it revealed the smaller (4.7m-long) and more affordable R2, which was developed with European exports in mind.

Speaking to Autocar at the recent Munich motor show, Rivian founder and CEO RJ Scaringe said the R2 would arrive in the first half of 2026 in North America, priced from around $45,000 (£33,000), and a European launch would follow.

Rivian plans to bring the R2 to the UK once left-hand-drive models are in mainland Europe, but there is no UK launch date yet.

The R2 is a Tesla Model Y rival with more than 300 miles of range and standard single-motor rear-wheel drive or optional dual-motor four-wheel drive.

There is no launch date for the closely related R3, which is smaller than the R2 and styled more like a raised hatchback. Rivian has also shown a tri-motor performance version, the rally-raid-style R3X.

Scaringe said his brand would be positioned in Europe as one that "remains highly aspirational but highly attainable". He continued: "Those things don't often go together. Often when you see the price go down, you see the desirability drop off. But this is what makes our R2 and R3 so interesting: they're inviting and attainable in their pricing but they still feel very special. They feel like every decision was thought about by someone who loves their job and loves what they're doing in a way that often you don't get in a sub-$40,000 car, where a lot of times it feels like somebody was just doing their job, ticking boxes and following a book of requirements versus debating every single piece of content, material selection and panel. We are loving every one of those decisions to make it feel like it's really curated."

The R2 will share a second-generation technology platform with the R1 siblings, which were extensively updated last year to be easier to manage and update in future.

Rivian's cutting-edge approach to software-defined vehicles consolidates the platform's ECUs into a smaller number

R1T: our testers found it to be quick, comfortable and mature-feeling

RIVIAN BOSS EXPLAINS 'AWESOME' SOFTWARE ADVANTAGE

Software-defined vehicles (SDVs) address the almost overwhelming complexity of cars with scores of ECUs all controlling different functions by consolidating them into a more centralised system that's easier and safer to update.

Be in no doubt that this switch to SDVs is as significant for the car industry as swapping internal combustion engines for battery power.

Rivian has emerged as a market leader in SDVs, so much so that the Volkswagen Group has not only invested in the company but also licensed its technology in a multibillion-dollar deal. Some vote of confidence.

We are all beginning to learn why SDVs are needed by car makers, but why are traditional vehicle manufacturers finding it so hard to make the switch?

Rivian boss RJ Scaringe has the answer: "We had the benefit of a company that was built from a technology-first perspective. From the get-go, we only ever thought about designing around electronics and using our own software.

"It's a big contrast to how large, existing OEMs have evolved. The way software architectures exist in essentially every car maker in the West outside of Tesla and Rivian evolved from fuel injection systems.

"The first computers made it into cars to control fuel injectors. At the time, nobody thought this was technology that needed to be owned, so it got pushed to suppliers.

"Slowly, over the last half century, you had systems that went from being analogue to being electrically actuated with a little computer – seats, HVAC, windows.

"All of a sudden, you had all these electric systems and controllers that were attached but never architected. In the end, you have a high-content vehicle that might have 100 little computers in it, each from a supplier.

"If you were to start with a clean sheet as a tech company, you would never in a million years build something with 100 different islands of software on 100 different computers, each built by different teams and suppliers.

"If you [as a car maker taking that approach] want to make updates along the way, you're co-ordinating among many different suppliers.

"So it's very hard to compete with someone like Rivian that is doing regular software improvements or updates responding to customer ideas. We'll be doing new software every month, because we own it.

"The challenge [for others] now is to flip to that [approach]. You've built your whole business around a way teams have been doing things for decades. To suddenly try to flip that in a really big organisation is really hard, and to date no one has successfully done it.

"And again, outside of China, there are only two companies in the world that have done this, and it's awesome."

Tech-first, clean-sheet approach gives Rivian an edge, says Scaringe

"Our goal is to build many millions of units a year"

of them across three distinct zones.

This system is also being used by the Volkswagen Group as part of a near $6 billion deal, and a version of it will appear first in the ID 1 and related models in 2026.

"The technology platform has become very, very robust and very scalable and has the benefit of a lot of volume against it, not just from our two [cars] but also from the ID 1 and through the whole portfolio of Volkswagen Group products," said Scaringe.

"It's giving us the sourcing leverage we never had before, but importantly we're really pushing the boundaries on how much we can optimise on cost, on in-vehicle experience and how we integrate and optimise around a high level of artificial intelligence."

Scaringe said that while the Volkswagen Group deal presented huge opportunities and advantages to the technology side of the business, it wouldn't limit Rivian's own lofty manufacturing ambitions.

"Our goal is to build many millions of units a year," he said. "We've often said we'd like to eventually grow in the markets we're in to at least 10% market share."

The focus will remain on North America and Europe to achieve that goal, with China not on Rivian's radar.

It currently has one manufacturing plant in Illinois and building work will soon begin on another in Georgia. Scaringe said European production is a long-term objective.

MARK TISSHAW

Grapevine

MARK TISSHAW

Scaringe still adopts start-up mentality, even after VW and Amazon tie-ups

THE FIRST TIME I interviewed Rivian founder and CEO RJ Scaringe was late on press day at the Los Angeles motor show in November 2018. Earlier that day, the young Floridian had finally gone public with the car company he had created from the ground up over the past decade.

At the time, Rivian felt different to other automotive start-ups in how seemingly Scaringe had thought of everything on the business and manufacturing side as well as simply creating a cool, compelling product in the R1. Most start-ups are great at the latter but fall over when attempting the former.

Since production started in 2021, Rivian has delivered more than 150,000 vehicles. Given that its original Illinois production facility was set up during the pandemic, after which the car industry was hit immediately by a semiconductor shortage and then a major shift in trade policies, it is something of an understatement when Scaringe says Rivian's launch has "not been easy".

Among his achievements to date, two stand out for Scaringe: first, how well the brand itself has resonated as one "that enables and inspires adventure". This family-friendly, outdoorsy brand image is exactly what he wanted.

Second is how well Rivian has almost lapped the field in customer satisfaction in the respected US Consumer Reports surveys. Its gap in percentage points to its closest competitor, BMW, is equal to that of second place down to 20th.

Rivian hasn't rushed its next steps but is now ready for its next move: expansion into not just a second model line but also other markets, including the UK. There will be a new factory in which to build it, too, in Georgia.

Scaringe says preparing to launch the R2 brings back "a lot of familiar feelings" from seven years ago, "except now we're so much more mature" and there's a robustness to the business.

Rivian now has 16,000 employees and its backers include Amazon and the Volkswagen Group (a deal Scaringe is particularly proud of, not least because the only non-Rivian vehicle he owns is a VW Corrado VR6), both of which have entrusted Rivian with the development of their own products.

Even with that scale, Scaringe says the company still feels "like a big start-up" and he has made sure a lot of technical teams still report to him directly to ensure that a technical focus remains.

This level of expertise in software development will remain, and with that a key advantage: legacy car companies just aren't set up with the "empathy" for software that is "second nature" to Rivian (see story above left).

In volume terms, Rivian is just 0.6% the size of the VW Group, yet the latter has come to the former for help in developing cars of the future. The 'next Tesla' has already been with us for seven years.

"There are a lot of familiar feelings, except now we're so much more mature"

NEW RENAULT GROUP BOSS BELIEVES IN DE MEO'S PLAN

In his first interview, François Provost discusses powertrain diversity, China, cost-cutting, F1 and why he's "a continuity man"

Compared with his slick-haired, sharp-suited predecessor, Luca de Meo, new Renault Group CEO François Provost has a decidedly professorial air about him. His suit and tie, his neat haircut and even his round-rimmed glasses speak of an innate conservatism.

There's no great difference in the two men's ages: 57-year-old Provost is currently working through his 23rd year at Renault, while de Meo was just a year older when he left in July to swap the automotive world for the Gucci luxury goods empire.

Looks, you soon learn, mean little. There's far less difference between the way the two men answer questions. Provost speaks with a brisk directness and a pleasant candour not so different from de Meo's.

That directness certainly worked well on his first meeting with Autocar and select other media at the recent Munich motor show: our time was limited to 20 minutes, and

Revived 5 and 4 show Renault's leadership in design, believes Provost

“We must make it clear that the industrial logic in Europe is wrong”

by my count he managed to deal with a dozen well-aimed questions.

Asked if he planned to change the path for Renault set by de Meo, Provost said: “I’m a continuity man. Our central task is to promote the Renaulution plan, to build a strong line-up in Europe and then to renew it. Of course, we must be ready to react if internal factors change, but we have the Ampere and Horse divisions [for EV and ICE powertrain development respectively] to help with that.”

A major challenge for Renault and other European companies is fending off the Chinese car offensive. Provost said his firm has no alternative but to catch up, citing the efforts to dramatically and quickly improve the line-up and reduce build costs by a massive 40%.

He made no claim in this interview for the 40% having yet been fully achieved, but he did point to the fact that the Renault Group marques had unveiled seven battery EVs in less than 18 months – those including the soon-to-arrive Renault Twingo, created in just 21 months.

”We are also capable of very strong and emotional designs,” declared Provost, “and we have proved it. We are better at this than our competitors, especially the Chinese. We are also busy improving our customer engagement: we respect our dealers and we aim to bring our own special values to the customer experience.”

At Munich, Horse unveiled a powertrain that could convert pure EVs to range-extenders, but asked if that could be applied to the Renault 5 or 4, Provost replied: “You won’t expect me to discuss my future product strategy here, but I can tell you I won’t be giving up on the trend to battery EVs. It is the right direction. But at times like these we need to be flexible and agile, which is why Horse is such an asset.”

Provost was more open on the European Union’s target to ban the sale of new ICE cars in 2035 – but was also thoughtful. “We should not focus on 2035,” he said, “even if it makes a nice hook for your headlines. The fact is that EV prices are far too high for people – right now – and because of that we are producing more carbon than we need to. We must make it clear that the industrial logic in Europe is wrong. What is needed is less regulation, which would allow car prices to be more affordable. Technology neutrality that pushes EVs forward should be the way.”

That message has been received by EU bosses, who have backed plans for a new class of small, affordable cars for Europe (see News, 17 September).

Like de Meo, Provost makes it clear he believes generally in pursuing value over volume with car sales – which instantly opens him to questions about how Renault is to cope with new car discounting, rising across Europe.

“We will follow the market,” he answered, “but without doing anything crazy. Again, this is why I continue to push on reducing costs…”

In recent months, the Renault Group’s share price has been a major concern for analysts and investors, and Provost brushed aside questions about how he would address that. “I do not believe our industry is properly valued at present,” he said. “Some investors are difficult to convince given the market’s uncertainties. But the Renaulution plan is our strength, and we remain agile and flexible.”

Provost was more open about Renault’s future in Formula 1, having attended the recent Italian Grand Prix. The Alpine team that the Renault Group owns has struggled on the track this year and for 2026 will controversially switch to using Mercedes-AMG power units, ending a long history of Renault building its own F1 powertrains. But the firm is still committed to the top tier of motorsport, he said.

“We will stay in F1,” insisted Provost. “We have good contracts and good sponsors, and I believe we have passed a tipping point. That’s not to say we are about to start winning, but I believe we now have stable management, and a good power unit from Mercedes. I think we now have a chance to do better.”

STEVE CROPLEY

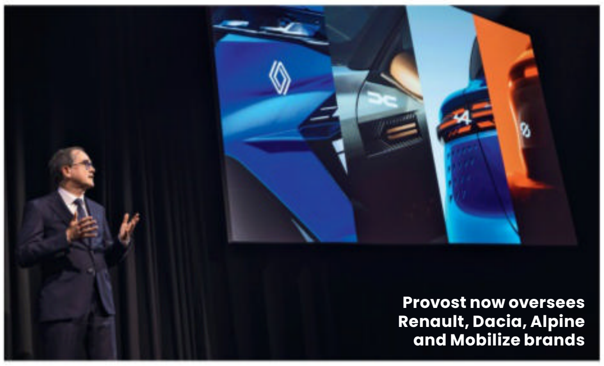
PROVOST’S UNCONVENTIONAL CV

François Provost didn’t start his career in the car industry: his first role was as a senior civil servant in the French ministry of economics and finance, and he later became a senior advisor to France’s defence ministry.

He joined Renault in 2002, initially heading the French sales division before becoming MD of Renault-Nissan Portugal. A stint as planning chief was followed by moves to Renault Russia and Renault Samsung Motors in South Korea, then heading the firm’s Chinese and Asia-Pacific operations.

He later became overall head of international development, then in 2023 was appointed the group’s procurement and partnerships chief.

Alpine F1 team hasn’t won a race since 2021, but its future is secure



Provost now oversees Renault, Dacia, Alpine and Mobilize brands

Horse will continue ICE engineering while Ampere develops EVs

BMW has worked with FCEV leader Toyota on iX5 Hydrogen prototype

PETROL, DIESEL, PHEV, BEV… AND NOW FCEV POWER FOR NEXT X5

BMW iX5 Hydrogen will be sold to the public with 300-plus miles of range

BMW has announced the first official details of the hydrogen X5 SUV that is scheduled for a market launch in 2028.

The arrival of the new FCEV will mean the fifth-generation X5, due on sale next year, will offer BMW's broadest-ever range of powertrains: petrol, diesel, plug-in hybrid, battery-electric and hydrogen fuel cell.

It has now been revealed in prototype form, with BMW officially confirming it will take the same iX5 name as the BEV variant.

"The launch of the X5 in five drivetrain configurations demonstrates our determination to serve different customer needs globally," said Joachim Post, the German manufacturer's R&D boss.

Although heavily camouflaged, the iX5 Hydrogen prototype hints at how the Mk5 X5 will adopt the bold Neue Klasse look that was introduced on the Mk2 iX3 at the recent Munich motor show.

Building on the iX5 Hydrogen test mule that was introduced in 2023, the new prototype uses a third-generation fuel cell stack, developed with Toyota, which is around 25% smaller than the current stack yet delivers greater power density and efficiency.

The system integrates a new high-voltage control unit, dubbed the BMW Energy Master.

There is a new fuel cell stack for improved efficiency

Production of key components is scheduled to begin in 2028 at BMW's plants in Steyr, Austria, and Landshut, Germany.

Performance targets have not yet been revealed, but BMW said the new system will surpass the figures of the 2023 FCEV prototype: a 167bhp stack, a 228bhp drive battery, a 396bhp rear-mounted electric motor and around 313 miles of range.

BMW has yet to confirm full details of the new X5, but it is set to be based on an updated version of the company's long-running Cluster Architecture (CLAR), rather than the new Neue Klasse EV platform, as used by the iX3.

The battery can clearly be seen packaged within the structure of the new iX5 Hydrogen prototype, supporting this CLAR speculation, as the Neue Klasse platform would have the pack integrated into the floor.

Inside, the prototype is seen to house a full-width head-up display and a 17.9in central infotainment screen, confirming that Neue Klasse design cues will also feature in the cabin.

BMW will phase out its long-running iDrive rotary controller, shifting towards touch and voice operation.

The new iX5 Hydrogen is set to become the first hydrogen car that BMW has ever sold. Along with the previous iX5 FCEV test mule, the company's only previous such prototype was the 2005 Hydrogen 7, an adapted E65 7 Series that used a bivalent 6.0-litre V12 engine.

GREG KABLE

VW RULES OUT A NEW CONVERTIBLE – FOR NOW

T-Roc Cabriolet was last drop-top VW; dual line-ups make it unviable

VOLKSWAGEN IS UNLIKELY to reintroduce convertibles or other bodystyle derivatives to its line-up while it continues to offer both combustion and electric models, according to design chief Andreas Mindt.

The brand has traditionally offered one convertible in its line-up, most recently a drop-top version of the previous-generation T-Roc crossover.

But asked about plans for a new convertible at the Munich motor show, Mindt said: "The trouble in the whole industry at the moment is that every company has a double portfolio [with electric and combustion cars] and that's a major problem.

"This is why you don't see convertibles any more, because everybody needs to double the portfolio. And that is really bad for investment. So if you have a software update, you have to apply it to double everything. That means nobody has the spare time to do a convertible.

"When we go to the age where we don't have double portfolios, when the ICE models are dying out, then you will see a lot more derivatives such as convertibles – and I'm not just talking about Volkswagen but the whole industry."

MY WEEK IN CARS

Steve Cropley

Revival revellers got drenched but rain didn't stop play at Goodwood

FRIDAY

An Ineos Grenadier pick-up (aka Quartermaster) might seem an odd conveyance for my journey to Goodwood for the first day of the Revival, but it turned out to be thoroughly good news – first because of the surprising cruising ability and second because of the built-in comfort.

Recaro may have recently caused Ineos a load of trouble with a pause in deliveries but, when they're actually installed, its seats are still better than most for firm, well-shaped long-distance comfort.

It took me a while to get to grips with the Grenadier's unusual controls and switchgear (the work of architect and yacht designer Toby Ecuyer). For several minutes I didn't even realise it had a simple key start. But once I learned its ways, I enjoyed the Grenadier a lot, especially its evident durability and very good build quality.

The colour, irreverently described by someone as hearing-aid beige, wouldn't have been my first choice, but in most other respects I warmed to it.

I had expected my own Ford Ranger Raptor to be superior in most ways (and it was in some) but ended up deciding the pair were good rivals.

The main Ineos bugbear still seems to be a shortage of buyers. Here's hoping potential customers wise up.

SATURDAY

I'm fascinated to learn that former McLaren Automotive CEO Mike Flewitt has taken over at Bonhams as global motoring chairman. He was spotted trying his new role for size at the auction house's recent Goodwood Revival sale.

A distinguished British engineer who has had various car industry consultancy jobs since leaving McLaren four years ago, Flewitt is a confirmed car lover and racer (Lotus especially) and looks just the person to provide a shot in the arm for a business that has recently been looking a bit slow, including at Goodwood. But maybe it's the weather.

SUNDAY

I headed back to Goodwood in the Grenadier – and made a big mistake. The Steering Committee and I are addicted to arriving at places early, but we changed our behaviour this time, getting to the circuit after rain had already shut some of the car parks and lesser vehicles than ours were getting bogged. The Grenadier was fine, of course, and the envy of many. In fact, it's quite good fun, slithering about when you know you're in something with no chance of getting stuck.

The wet made the racing (some of which we watched on the phone) livelier than ever. What a pleasure to see Mini hero Nick Swift carve his way through the St Mary's Trophy field, past all those cars four times more powerful (see above). It was the highlight of the meeting for me.

Quartermaster can give Ranger Raptor a run for its money

> **"It's fun, slithering about knowing you won't get stuck"**

TUESDAY

These days you don't need a calendar to know it's autumn, because you've got TPMS (aka tyre pressure monitoring systems). Two of my cars (Renault 5 and Dacia Duster) decided within 12 hours that their tyre pressures were wrong and urgently needed adjusting, mostly because the ambient temperature has fallen to 12dec C in our neck of the woods. It's no bother to adjust them, mind, and the car always rolls noticeably better once you've done it.

THURSDAY

An excellent development: Jonathan Palmer's Motorsport Vision company (which operates race circuits all over the UK, plus the Bedford Autodrome) has bought Motorsport News, the 70-year-old former Autocar stablemate. The plan is to expand the newspaper's coverage of British racing and to combine it with the similarly named website, which MSV already owns.

Palmer credits Motorsport News with "playing a really important part" in the careers of himself and other top racers. He is concerned about the reducing coverage of UK motorsport in printed media and determined to reverse the trend.

The first MSV-backed issue of Motorsport News will hit newsstands tomorrow.

AND ANOTHER THING

Wonderful gesture by California's ArtCenter College of Design: it has created a scholarship to honour the former Rolls-Royce and BMW designer Ian Cameron, who died in tragic circumstances in 2024. Cameron led the revival of the Rolls-Royce marque, culminating in the 2003 launch of the seminal Phantom Mk7.

GET IN TOUCH

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PRIOR CONVICTION

Matt Prior

Petty Gripes, The Guardian calls its series of light-hearted features on elements of modern life that involve minorly annoying things. Things like bands that name themselves after other bands or being irritated by somebody else's coffee snobbery. You know, little quirks.

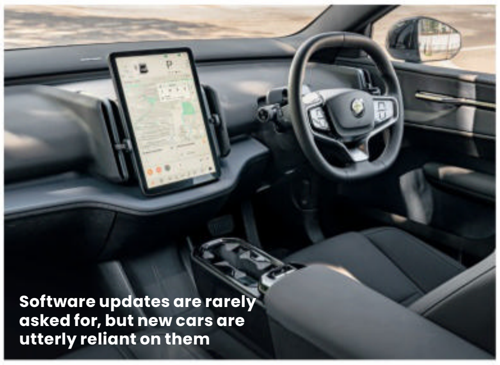
In one recent article, a software update in a writer's phone meant that his maps app would no longer talk to his car's infotainment system. Automatic software updates duly went down as another petty gripe.

I wish my patience and tolerance could mean that software updates – or software glitches in general, for that matter – could be deemed merely petty gripes.

On the list of gripes I have, automatic updates, apparently for my benefit but which rarely feel it, are right up there in the pantheon of mighty annoyances – along with the worst of them, the ones about which I'm too cross to mention.

A petty gripe, for me, is the way the film never tears cleanly from the corner of a packet of bacon or the chafing the back of my thumb gets when I slide my feet into my trainers. Whereas if my phone has decided that today it won't pair with a car's audio system, or if a car's touchscreen crashes when it was fine yesterday, or – and let's broaden this out to software complaints in general – a driver assistance system tugs at the steering wheel, hauls on the brakes or beeps at me unnecessarily, these are more than petty gripes. I probably never get quite so furious.

I think it's because of the futility of it all. When these things go wrong, there's literally nothing you can do, save for turn it off and on again and hope. Whereas I can slide a knife down the side of a packet of bacon or I could use a shoehorn if my thumb really hurt. And if a piece of hardware fails in my car, I can at least see what has happened and plan a way to fix it.



Software updates are rarely asked for, but new cars are utterly reliant on them

Punctures are annoying, because usually they're down to someone else's carelessness with screws or road maintenance. But I've had cars and motorbikes with broken springs or injectors or cracked exhausts, and I don't mind that they've failed at all, because things just wear out; I can see they're broken.

But when it comes to software failing, sometimes apparently through age, sometimes through updates, sometimes through being terrible in the first place, I can't plan a fix; I'm just left helpless.

> **"These are more than petty gripes. I never get quite so furious"**

As a result, I've wanted to throw the products they're running from tall buildings; to break them into thousands of tiny shards and scatter them across the bedroom floors of their creators in the middle of the night, then set off their smoke alarms.

Recently a Bluetooth speaker induced in me such a rage when it refused to pair with my phone that I'm actually embarrassed about it. But I just wanted to listen to the radio on a Saturday afternoon, and that was literally its only job. I didn't want it to fly me to Saturn.

I suppose there is a point of 'peak' software in our lives, and we all have a different idea of where that is. For some, it's the latest and most complex operating system; for others, it's nothing at all; and for most of us, it's somewhere in the middle.

The problem is that, unlike lots of other aspects of life, we don't get to choose how much exposure we have to software. One of the reasons why I drive my old Audi A2 so often, and why I'm delighted to be in Autocar's Morgan Super 3 the rest of the time, is that by and large they leave me alone, and I can stick a phone to the dashboard if I really want to read a map.

It's really hard to buy a new car that doesn't have vast amounts of software whether you want it or not. It will be connected, it will update and at some point it will crash or glitch and you will have no idea what went wrong or how to fix it.

I wish I weren't so petty. But at times like that, I want to smother things in diesel, flick a match at them and watch them burn.

GET IN TOUCH
matthew.prior@haymarket.com

Complicated-looking 'flight decks' like this can actually make life easier

RACING LINES

Damien Smith

Learner Verstappen aced his driving test at the Nordschleife

Huge credit to Max Verstappen. Seven days after his dominant Italian Grand Prix win and on a weekend off from a 24-race Formula 1 season, the four-time champion pitched up at the Nürburgring to make his long-awaited race debut on the Nordschleife – with the racing equivalent of a humbling L-plate stuck on the back of his car.

Rules about who qualifies to race on the fearsome 12.94-mile track are strictly policed, and there are no exceptions on the process that must be followed – even for one of the greatest F1 drivers in history. Without a complaint and with an admirable lack of ego, Verstappen undertook the pre-weekend theory test, then made his race debut in a round of the Nürburgring Langstrecken-Serie (NLS) in a modest Porsche 718 Cayman GT4 – which had been detuned to match his rookie status! The big red Permit B sticker on the rear of the Red Bull-liveried coupé completed the humbling experience.

The whole point was for Verstappen to earn a Permit A, which will allow him to race GT3 sports cars on the Nordschleife and eventually in the Nürburgring 24 Hours. He didn't quite hit the requirements (through no fault of his own), but the organising committee saw sense and avoided a major embarrassment for themselves by granting him his permit.

Writing ahead of the Azerbaijan GP, the talk is that Verstappen might well turn out this weekend for the next NLS round in an Emil Frey Racing Ferrari 296 GT3 – the car in which it's thought he has already beaten the Nordschleife lap record, running in a test in May under the pseudonym of Franz Hermann.

Naturally, he drove the Cayman beautifully, even if its state of tune ruled him uncompetitive – but it was his humility and unquestioning acceptance of the hoops that he needed to jump through that really stood out and showed the best side of his pure-bred racer character. Chapeau.

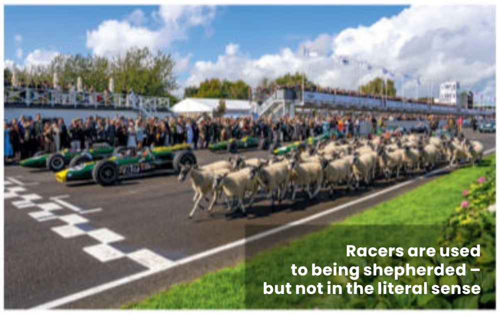
> "Max's humility and acceptance showed the best side of him"

SHEEP AND GOATS

Seen it all before? That's never true at the Goodwood Revival. The sight this year of a flock of sheep gambolling up the start/finish straight shepherded via a pair of Border collies was a novelty in the extreme. It was all part of the celebrations to mark 60 years since the greatest season from any single racing driver.

Jim Clark remains feted as a contender for the GOAT, but the sheep association is stronger, thanks to his grounding roots as a farmer. That season in 1965, the Lotus ace won six of the first seven F1 grands prix to be crowned champion for a second time by August. The one he didn't win was Monaco, but that's because he was busy scoring a landmark victory in a Lotus 38 in the Indianapolis 500 – a first for a rear-engined car. He also claimed both British and French Formula 2 titles and the Tasman Cup in Australia and New Zealand to complete a unique set.

The flock of sheep was a humorous yet touching way to salute the quiet legend.



Racers are used to being shepherded – but not in the literal sense

As for the racing, the Revival as always served a feast. Highlights included Tom Kristensen's monster Ford Thunderbird gobbling up Steve Soper's Ford Fairlane in the St Mary's Trophy and Rob Huff and Tom Ingram sparring in the rain in a pair of Jaguar E-Types. Huff was first on the road by a whisker, but a 10-second pit stop violation penalty handed Ingram his second consecutive win in the RAC TT Celebration. Huff was still smiling anyway, because that's just the way it is at Goodwood.

TAKING THE FIFTH

An epic World Rally Championship continues to thrill. In Chile, Sébastien Ogier completed a South American double after his victory in Paraguay, his fifth of the season lifting him back into the points lead. The Frenchman saw off Toyota team-mate Elfyn Evans as the Japanese marque racked up a record 103rd WRC success.

Welshman Evans is just two points behind eight-time champion Ogier with three rounds to go. Having lost his points lead, he won't start first on the road next time out on the Central European Rally (based in Germany), but it's an asphalt round, so that's probably to Ogier's benefit. With 24-year-old two-time champion Kalle Rovanperä now 21 points adrift of 41-year-old Ogier, Evans is beginning to look like the only one in a position to stop his team-mate equalling Sébastien Loeb's record of nine WRC crowns. But the smart money is on Ogier, who is driving as well as he ever has this season.

SILVERSTONE GLORY

It was great to see Jamie Chadwick take a home win as Le Mans Prototype racing returned to the UK for the European Le Mans Series' Silverstone 4 Hours. She shared IDEC Sport's LMP2 Oreca with Mathys Jaubert and Daniel Juncadella, and the trio will now have a shot at the title when the season concludes at Portimão next month.

VLN / ROLEX

YOUR VIEWS

WRITE TO autocar@haymarket.com

Letter of the week

SIMPLY THE BEST

I have a red 2016 Volvo V40 D3 auto, and I love it. I won't swap it for anything else until we are forced apart. It represents the peak of car design, for me at least. Anything on sale now is too compromised. A 50mpg engine, no cheap plastics, sensible-sized wheels, no touchscreen, no annoying 'safety' features (just the comfort of knowing that I have a boron steel safety cage around me and my family), the best seats ever made, a great stereo (with a CD player!), low insurance, £20 annual tax and it still looks great (almost as good as new, I can proudly boast: detailing is my new hobby).

I would advise anyone thinking of buying a brand-new or used SUV to check how much the tyres will cost or, God forbid, the cost of replacing an LED headlight unit a few years down the line.

I wonder what other people think is the peak of automotive excellence?

Mike Fox, North Yorkshire

TOO FAST TO BE TRUE

Having recently exchanged my BMW with a claimed 0-60mph time of 7.3sec for one with a more leisurely time of 7.6sec, I stumbled on to Road Tests Revisited (27 August), where a hefty Wolseley 6/110 from the 1960s was pictured boasting a 99mph top speed yet a heady 0-60mph time of 6.4sec!

My father bought a similar Austin Westminster and on acquisition, with me strapped in as a mini navigator, tested it on a downhill stretch of the A23. Despite best efforts and light traffic, the elusive ton was close but not achieved. The only thing on it faster than the meaty acceleration was the rust bug.

Patrick Hogan
Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire

Sorry: it actually took 15.1sec – KC

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

So Ford's future is an electric crossover similar in size to the current Focus (News, 3 September). But isn't that what the Explorer already is? By the sound of it, Ford's European model range will become even more lopsided and confused, with this new 'Focus' crossover, the similarly sized Explorer, the Explorer-based Capri and the same-sized but completely decrepit Kuga all falling over themselves! Even the Mustang Mach-E is only marginally larger than these cars.

Ford is in a hole right now. It needs to stop digging!

Paul Hampson
Via email

MOUNTING FRUSTRATION

My daughter has a 2016 Citroën C1. On 17 July, her garage ordered a replacement offside engine mount from Citroën. After a month of waiting and pressing the local Citroën dealer, I contacted Citroën customer service. They said the part wasn't in stock so needed to be ordered from a supplier. Despite repeated attempts to obtain an ETA, the best I've procured is that we will be first on the list when the part is available. I've also been told the part will cost over £200, because it will be specifically made, when normally it would be around £50.

Isn't Citroën obliged to provide a basic part for a popular car that left production only three years ago? What can I do? Our local garage says it's never heard anything like it.

Geoff Procter
Wells, Somerset

Regrettably, parts supply issues have been endemic for a few years now – KC

SAVED IN SLOW-MO

I couldn't believe it when Nick Ritblat wrote about his Land Rover Discovery Sport not stopping him from hitting the back of another vehicle in slow-moving traffic (27 August). Surely most minor dings happen at speeds below 3mph?

I know my Mercedes-Benz EQS will stop itself at even slower speeds than that: recently I got distracted while reversing towards my garage but the car slammed on the brakes before I dented the door.

Rather alarming, though, was the fact that last winter, when it was icy for a few days in a row, moisture built up over some of the front sensors and so one morning the car refused to move. Because the sensor had ice around it, it told me I was against an object. I had my foot flat to the floor but the car was going nowhere. I had to get my de-icer out of the boot and spray the sensors before it would let me drive away.

Nick Brunner
Via email

Polestar's as European as the Eiffel Tower, its boss reckons. Not all of you agree

Can Explorer successfully coexist with new 'Focus'?

Chris is smitten with his frugal diesel Passat Estate

WAKE UP, EUROPE

So Polestar doesn't want Europe's 2035 ICE car sales deadline to be moved (What We Did This Week, 17 September). Why would it? It's a Chinese-owned, EV-only manufacturer that makes not a single car in Europe.

Can anyone tell me why someone would give Polestar the time of day over Mercedes-Benz, Stellantis or the Volkswagen Group?

If Europe as a whole – including the UK – doesn't wake up, then there will be no European-owned manufacturers left in 30 years.

Are the EU and the UK so utterly incompetent that they can't see what's happening? Or do they want to lose their remaining car manufacturing, like they have lost most of the rest of their manufacturing to the east?

Europe is dying a slow death in not just car manufacturing, and it's so frustrating for anyone with any intelligence to watch.

We need people in charge who have some common sense.

David Michaels
Via email

POLES APART

I see that Polestar CEO Michael Lohscheller says "we are Europe's only 100% electric car brand". Polestar's key manufacturing sites are in Chengdu, China; Hangzhou Bay, China; and Ridgeville, South

Carolina, the US; its future plant will be in Busan, South Korea; and it's owned by China's Geely. So what's the point he's making?

Kim Martin
Via Facebook

Polestar's headquarters are in Sweden, it has engineering facilities in Sweden and here in the UK, and it plans to manufacture its 7 crossover at a new factory in Slovakia from 2028 – KC

WHO NEEDS HYBRIDS?

I warmed to Paul Andrews' letter about the satisfaction to be gained from driving to maximise MPG (3 September), although it's only valid if at the same time you proceed as fast as limits and safety will permit.

However, he mentions coasting in his Mazda 6 Tourer. May I point out that in modern cars with fuel injection, he may do better leaving the car in a high gear? In neutral, the engine will still be using fuel, but on the overrun if the RPM is above idle speed, no fuel will be used, although there will be a little engine braking.

My 2021 Volkswagen Passat Estate 2.0 TDI, now loosened up after 37,000 miles, returned 68mpg on a 520-mile journey from Crinan on the west coast of Scotland to Somerset, averaging 59mph and doing the limit wherever possible. On another trip to Inverness, we averaged 63mph and 62mpg.

Why would I want a petrol car – even a hybrid?

Chris Barker
West Coker, Somerset

INEFFICIENT AND UNSAFE

As an advanced police-trained driver and a member of the IAM, I feel I have to reply to Paul Andrews' letter, in which he said he coasts on long, shallow downhill stretches as part of his attempt to get good MPG.

This is poor driving in the extreme. Modern fuel systems mean that coasting is no longer beneficial to energy efficiency, but of far more concern is that it is unsafe, as you don't have full control over the car when it's in neutral. You can't suddenly accelerate out of an emergency situation and of course you lose engine braking and therefore run the risk of overheating the brakes when going downhill.

Please, if nothing else, Mr Andrews (and anyone else coasting), don't do it!

Tom Baker
Via email

Weekly winner

Letter of the week wins this ValetPro exterior protection and maintenance kit worth £48

GREAT REASONS TO BUY

Next week's issue

ON SALE 1 OCTOBER

TWIN TEST

HOT HATCH HEROES BOW OUT

We take one final fling in the Ford Focus ST and Honda Civic Type R to mark the end of the era of petrol-powered hot hatchbacks

FIRST DRIVE

ASTON MARTIN DBX S

Lighter and with a 717bhp V8, is this the DBX to eclipse all super-SUVs?

INSIGHT

HOW TO GET THE BEST NEW CAR DISCOUNT

List prices may be soaring, but we've managed to save £47,123 on the top 10 best-sellers. We reveal the best ways to get a new car for less

EVERY WEEK

USED GUIDE

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The original was a class leader when new and is now just £3500

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JEEP WRANGLER

How did this American off-road icon suit life in urban Britain?

CONTENTS SUBJECT TO CHANGE

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HOW WE TEST CARS

Autocar delivers several kinds of reviews on new cars, with different levels of technical and functional scrutiny. As the name suggests, our First Drives section typically addresses cars that we're driving for the first time – either in final production form or as late prototypes. Time in the car can be limited here, technical and equipment specification might not be finalised and some systems software may not be to production specification. For those reasons, First Drive reports don't have star ratings.

Once we have driven a car for a second time in the UK, in right-hand-drive form and typically at greater length, we will rate it, either as part of a shorter UK test report or as the subject of a full, instrumented Road Test.

In the latter case, we take empirical performance and refinement benchmarks from it at Horiba MIRA proving ground, as well as subjective limit handling impressions, plus key measurements of practicality, efficiency and kerb weight.

All UK tests and Road Tests receive proper verdicts with star ratings informed by everything we have learned and the combined impressions and experience of several testers.

FIRST DRIVES

TESTED 15.9.25, ANDALUSIA, SPAIN **DELIVERIES** NOVEMBER

KIA EV4

Is this hatch as talented as Kia's many electric SUVs?

Remember the e-Golf? It was Volkswagen's first serious mass-produced EV, and even though it was a converted petrol Golf, it was rather good for its time. Since then, compelling traditional hatchbacks in Europe's heartland C-segment have been in short supply. There have been the VW ID 3 and its Cupra Born twin (which we like a lot), but they're more like MPVs, while their Skoda Elroq cousin goes for more of an SUV vibe. The same is true of Renault's Megane and Scenic. The Peugeot e-308 and Vauxhall Astra Electric are true hatchbacks but feel a generation behind.

Meanwhile, Kia has made its way through electric SUVs of various sizes to the traditional hatch with the EV4. It may be traditional in its positioning, but it certainly doesn't look like a Mk7 Golf. With its vertical 'star map' headlights, bold black wheel arches, boomerang rear lights and various unusual slashes, it's sure to divide opinion. I think it's hideous, but others seem to like it, and I've got time for design that doesn't try to please everyone.

Kia really is leaning into the EV4's hatchiness. While most buyers will continue to pick the slightly smaller EV3 SUV or the upcoming, slightly bigger EV5 SUV, it reckons there are still plenty of buyers who really want the lower driving position and enhanced driving dynamics of a hatchback. Amen to that.

By and large, the EV4 is an EV3 but flatter. That's true for its technical specification (the 400V, front-motor version of the E-GMP platform with a choice of a 58.3kWh or 81.4kWh battery; MacPherson struts up front and a multi-link rear) and true for its interior.

The dashboard looks familiar, with the same big driver display and touchscreen combo that has been rolled out across the Kia range, with some useful toggle switches for the climate control and a row of multimedia shortcut buttons.

The brushed aluminium – cough, plastic – and fabric or faux leather

Handling could be more exciting but it makes a superb motorway car

DO YOU WANT A BIGGER BUM?

As well as a hatchback, there's the EV4 Fastback saloon. I had a brief go in it and can confirm that it drives exactly the same.

The wide-opening boot is slightly larger (490 litres), but you can't fold down the rear seats and rear passengers have slightly less head room.

In the UK, the Fastback is offered only in 81.4kWh GT-Line and GT-Line S forms.

Thanks to better aero, each Fastback has 18 miles more range than the equivalent hatch. The rangiest EV4, however, is the 81.4kWh hatch in basic Air trim.

Spec for spec, the Fastback is £1500 more expensive.

TESTER'S NOTE

The EV4 hatch is taking over from Ceed production in Zilina, Slovakia, making it the first Kia EV produced in Europe. The hatch is just for Europe; the Fastback is made in Gwangmyeong, South Korea, for the global market. **IV**

Dash is familiar from other Kia EVs – and the infotainment once again is top-notch

trim on the dashboard is attractive enough and the ratio of soft to scratchy plastic is appropriate for the class.

It's not short of storage space either, even if items do rattle around in the hard plastic bins.

As usual, Kia's infotainment system works near flawlessly.

Typically for an EV, there's plenty of outright space in the back and in the boot (435 litres), albeit with a floor that's slightly too high.

For all the talk about hatchbacks and driving dynamics, I'm not feeling it here. Without question, you feel like you're sitting on top of the battery, with a seat that's very comfortable but feels stuck in a high setting and a steering column that pokes out of the dash at a slightly bus-like angle. The Born may not be a true hatchback, but it feels more at ease with itself.

Point the EV4 at a corner and it all feels quite distant. The suspension needs a moment to settle into its preferred angle of roll and in all modes the steering feels like a bad hydraulic rack, with that oily-slick feel but little in the way of precision or feedback.

Presumably real dynamics will have to wait for the dual-motor EV4 GT that's coming soon.

With all that said, the enduring impression is one of comfort. The generous suspension movements mean it absorbs bumps very well, and even the secondary ripples, potholes and asperities are nicely cushioned. I drove cars on both 17in and 19in wheels, and the difference was marginal. That's good news, since most UK buyers are expected to pick the GT-Line, which comes with big alloys.

On a well-maintained Spanish motorway at least, the EV4 is very quiet as well, subjecting you to hardly any wind or road roar.

It should be a competent long-distance shuttle, then, partly because Kia has got a handle on the ADAS stuff in recent years.

Can it do the distance? I saw 3.6mpkWh, which equates to about 275 miles. That's not setting new standards but is competitive enough given the route wasn't very kind on the efficiency figure, with plenty of hard mountain driving in hot temperatures. DC rapid charging at 129kW is looking a bit weedy, but experience of the EV3 tells us that the EV4 should equal most rivals in practice.

Prices start at £34,695 for the 58.3kWh Air, but only £3000 upgrades you to the 81.4kWh Air, which is all you really need. Even so, most buyers are expected to go for the GT-Line, which adds, among other things, sportier styling, better seats and a wireless phone charger. That's all slightly cheaper than the Born but quite a lot more than the Megane or even the Scenic.

The EV4, then, is neither the Mk2 e-Golf of our dreams nor a disruptor. But then on the ICE side, the C-segment has always been filled to the brim with hatchbacks of all persuasions, so to have a new comfy EV option feels like natural order being restored.

ILLYA VERPRAET

> **"The enduring impression is one of comfort. It absorbs bumps very well and nicely cushions potholes"**

TECH SPEC

KIA EV4 GT-LINE

Distinctively styled, quite sensible and very comfy, it feels less like the Golf of EVs and more like the Citroën ZX of EVs – an entirely good thing

Price £39,395
Engine Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Power 201bhp
Torque 209lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, FWD
Kerb weight 1896kg
0-62mph 7.5sec
Top speed 105mph
Battery 81.4/78.0kWh (total/usable, est)
Range, economy 362 miles, 4.3mpkWh
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals Peugeot e-308, Renault Megane

TESTED 16.9.25, WARWICKSHIRE **DELIVERIES** NOW

CHANGAN DEEPAL S07

Yet another Chinese brand arrives with a keenly priced, tech-heavy SUV

Meet the Changan Deepal S07. Yup, that's right, another brand arriving from China – but bear with me, because Changan actually has heritage and its Deepal brand already has merits.

Changan is the oldest Chinese manufacturer of passenger cars, having been producing them for its domestic market since 1984. Not only that, but it also has had a design centre in Italy since 2001, another in Germany since 2021 and an R&D centre in the UK since 2010.

Changan launched the Deepal brand in 2022, and here we have its first UK-market model, the S07. This 4.75m-long, five-seat electric SUV uses a CATL-sourced 75kWh (usable capacity) nickel-manganese-cobalt battery for a range of 295 miles. It's aimed squarely at the Skoda Enyaq, Tesla Model Y and BYD Sealion 7.

To my eyes, the S07 is breathtakingly derivative. It looks like a Lotus, a Lexus, a Polestar, a Cupra, a BYD and plenty more besides. At a glance, I'd struggle to tell it apart from a number of other big electric SUVs, and I stare at these things for a living…

The interior is a big selling point, though. It's spacious and the perceived material quality is decent, with a smart blend of materials, a tactile steering wheel and a generally solid feel that will give Tesla something to think about.

There's no traditional driver's readout, but a standard head-up display offers a speed readout as well as augmented sat-nav guidance.

The 15.6in portrait-oriented touchscreen can be set to swivel towards the driver or passenger, which is a neat feature. Within it, you will find the controls for the side mirrors, windscreen wipers and more, which is annoying, but at least a swipe-down shortcut menu allows quick control of many key features, including ADAS functions.

Naturally, voice control is included, as are over-the-air software updates, wireless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto.

As is often the case with Chinese cars, rear passenger space is a priority, so there's tons of space in the back of the S07. You also get your own control for the roof blind, as well as rear climate control.

A 445-litre boot is adequate but it's a fairly shallow space, and the rear seats are short on versatility (they don't slide, they only fold in a 60/40 split and there's no seven-seat option).

The S07 has rear-wheel drive, courtesy of a single 215bhp electric motor. That's good enough to shove the 2073kg SUV from 0-62mph in 7.9sec, which makes it gutsy enough

Rear passengers get lots of room and, thanks to a glass roof, plenty of light

"Restless damping, heavy lean and peculiar lateral suspension movement combine to make it feel wobbly yet very lumpy" for quick motorway merges and junction getaways.

Sport mode makes a big difference to the accelerator response. In Eco and Comfort modes it feels neutered and is clearly prioritising efficiency, while Sport makes the pedal response much sharper.

There are two levels of regenerative braking. Both are fairly heavy and neither offers brilliant feel or modulation, so it can take a bit of time and some very accurate feathering to drive the car smoothly. Even when you do rely on the brake pedal, it's an inconsistent response.

As for the range, the official figure of 295 miles is okay-ish, but many rivals go farther. DC rapid-charging speeds also lag behind most rivals, at 93kW. At least an efficiency-boosting heat pump and vehicle-to-load charging are both included.

The S07's ride and handling are disappointing. Changan tells us it has re-engineered the suspension for UK and European tastes, chiefly by making the passive dampers (there are no plans to offer the active dampers for now) stiffer to tighten up the primary ride, over the soft suspension favoured by Chinese buyers.

It may have gone a little too far, though, as the result is restless vertical damping that has the S07 thumping and bobbing over expansion joints and the corrugated surfaces typical of UK roads. Added to the heavy body lean and slightly peculiar lateral suspension movement that you get in faster direction changes, this makes the S07 feel wobbly yet very lumpy, which isn't ideal.

At least the steering response is predictable, and you can weight it up in Sport mode, while traction is fine and the nose feels confident enough when you want to swing through a fast roundabout.

In short, the S07 feels okay-ish to steer through the everyday muddle, but that ride on the standard 20in wheels and Dunlop Sport Maxx tyres is very wearisome.

If incohesive dynamics and laggardly charging are chief reasons to avoid the S07, its price and standard equipment are the biggest points in its favour. It costs just under £40,000, dodging the UK's 'luxury car tax', and gets everything you can think of as standard: keyless entry, 10-way electric driver's seat adjustment, a panoramic roof, a 10-speaker sound system, a light show, a Dog mode, a Camping mode, a Nap mode… the list goes on. Even the jazzy metallic paint colours are standard, as are any of the three interior finishes.

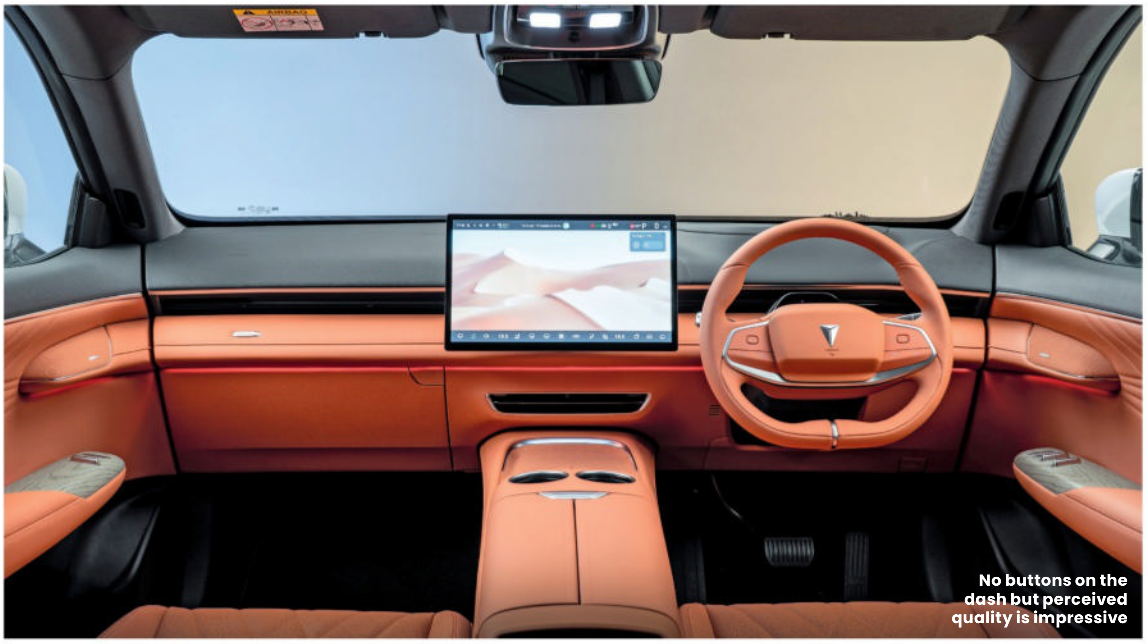
A vehicle warranty of seven years or 100,000 miles is good enough to make even Kia and Hyundai pause momentarily in their world domination, while a battery warranty of eight years or 125,000 miles is better than most.

Changan currently has 20 dealerships across the UK and expects to have up to 50 by the end of 2025 (courtesy of established multi-brand franchises), so it won't be long before you will be able to buy one somewhere near you.

The S07 will feel like a lot of car for the money to many buyers – especially if those monthly PCP finance deals are right. But there are a whole host of alternative electric SUVs that are better to drive and faster to charge, including smaller yet still practical and similarly priced alternatives like the longer-range Kia EV3 and Skoda Elroq.

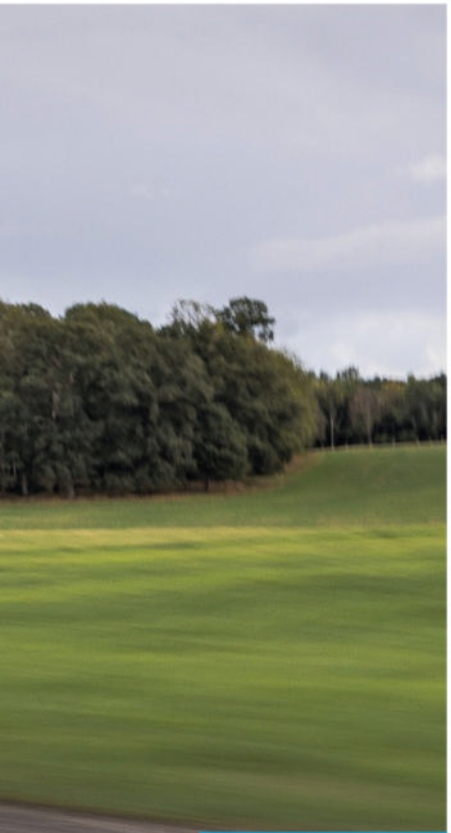
So while the S07 has some persuasive aspects, it's going to be a while before Changan is troubling Tesla.

VICKY PARROTT



No buttons on the dash but perceived quality is impressive

Ride is tiresome and body control is unsettled at faster driving speeds



TESTER'S NOTE

Smoking mode automatically lowers the windows and circulates the air in the cabin to keep it smelling as fresh as possible. No, really. **VP**

TECH SPEC

CHANGAN DEEPAL S07

Spacious, lustrous and lavishly equipped inside, but other electric SUVs are better to drive, faster to charge and longer-legged

Price £39,990
Engine Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Power 215bhp
Torque 236lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, RWD
Kerb weight 2073kg
0-62mph 7.9sec
Top speed 112mph
Battery 78/75kWh (total/usable)
Range, economy 295 miles, 3.3mpkWh
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals Leapmotor C10, Tesla Model Y

> “Body control is great and it steers terrifically well. The good thing is how coherent it all feels”

TESTED 16.9.25, SURREY **DELIVERIES** SPRING 2026

ZENOS E10

Hardcore Brit roadster revived with way more power and far higher price

Zenos is back. I know it’s possible that you don’t remember it from the first time, so, to recap, this two-seat lightweight roadster, the E10, was the brainchild of some engineers who had worked at Lotus and Caterham and was introduced to us in 2014.

It was deliberately built down to a price – £24,995 – because the founders thought there were too many sports cars that were designed to be perfect so ended up so expensive that they only had one customer: the company’s founder.

Owing to its price and being nice to drive, the E10 was reasonably popular (I think more than 100 were made), but it was too cheap, and so in 2017 Zenos went into administration, from which its assets were acquired by AC Cars.

There they remain, and in the past year AC has started taking a Zenos resurrection seriously.

The E10 you see here is the only working prototype, a test bed for the new powertrain. But AC thinks it will be customer-ready in the second quarter of next year, at a price that will let it wipe its feet. More on which later.

Structurally, the E10 is mostly as before. A passenger tub is made of a vast extruded-aluminium central section, with plastic and recycled carbonfibre surrounding it.

Then there are body panels, which will get a minor restyling (notably the lights) and be made of carbonfibre on the production car.

At the front, there’s double-wishbone suspension with pushrods. There’s currently an aluminium rear subframe (also with double wishbones), although this will probably be changed to steel.

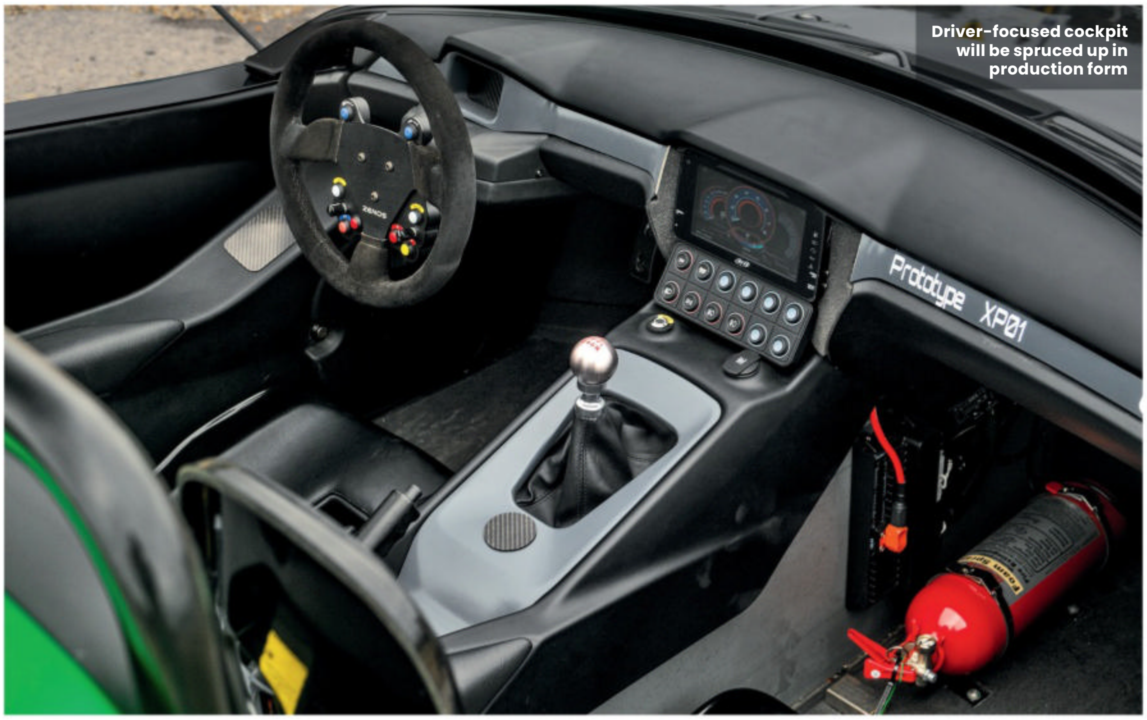
The E10 originally had a four-cylinder Ford Ecoboost engine with 200bhp. The new one has quite a lot more than that. Ford no longer makes that particular unit, so AC has ‘done a Caterham’ and contacted Horse, the Renault-Geely joint venture that’s in the business of selling combustion engines to

Central screen will remain, but finished cars won’t get the driver-facing display

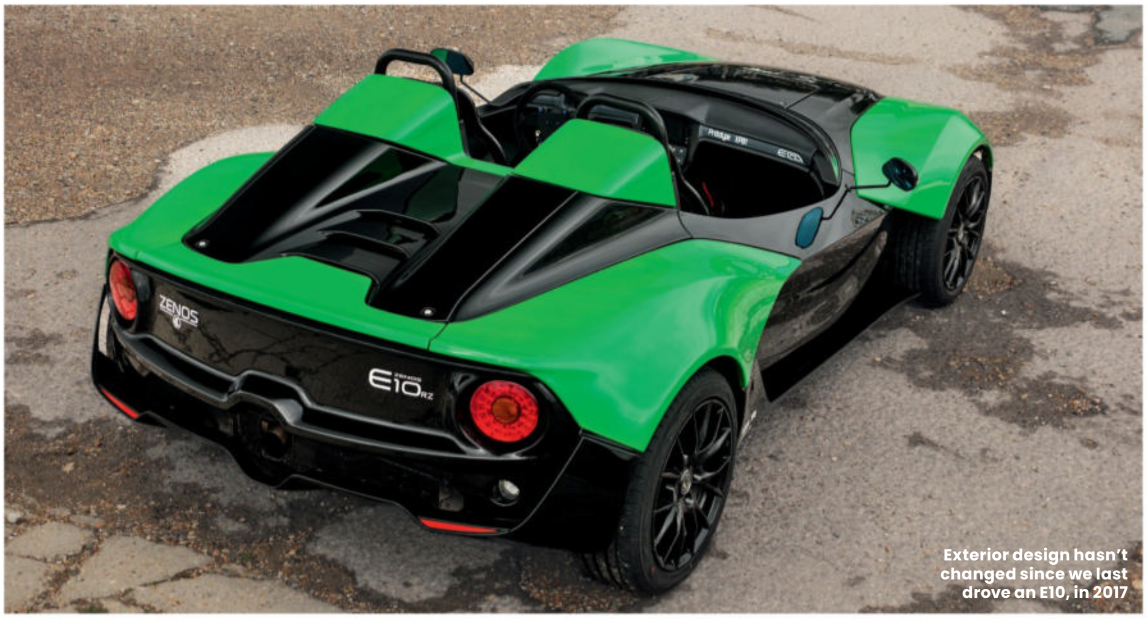
These seats will be replaced by lightweight carbonfibre items

TESTER'S NOTE

Wind buffeting without a screen isn't too bad, but it is breezy. I think I'd go with a screen on the road. **MP**



Driver-focused cockpit will be spruced up in production form



Exterior design hasn't changed since we last drove an E10, in 2017

third parties. (I get the impression we will be hearing more and more about this knightly saviour of small sports car makers.)

With a host of brands to choose from within Geely and Renault, AC alighted on a 2.0-litre four-cylinder turbocharged Volvo engine. The Swedish firm has powered sports cars before (most recently with the Volvo/Yamaha V8 from the Noble M600), but to me this still feels something of a novelty.

Here it revs to 7200rpm, and with a charge-air cooler and its own ECU (part of an entirely new 'can bus' electronics and electrical system), it makes 380bhp and 376lb ft of torque.

It drives through a six-speed manual gearbox to the rear wheels. The production car will have a limited-slip differential.

The engineers asked if I would overlook the tattiness of this workhorse, and I will.

Making the body from carbonfibre means the car should tip the scales at under 800kg. When we road tested an E10 in 2015, it was 900kg, so with carbonfibre panels and no fuel, I can see how it would get there. There will be new lighter seats, too, and an interior makeover.

You step over the sill to get in. The driving position is great, the gearlever is high and the pedal spacing is wide. The steering and brakes are unassisted. Visibility is good, except over the shoulder to the passenger side.

The E10 is 3.9m long and just under 1.9m wide. A windscreen was available as an option before and will be again, but today is a helmet-on experience.

The clutch weighting, firm brake pedal feel and throttle response are all very well judged. The engine is docile at low revs. The gearshift needs a little tightening and will get it.

This engine is heavily turbocharged, so there is a little lag at low revs, but by 2500rpm it's becoming explosive and it doesn't let up thereafter. High up the rev range it's exceptionally urgent and there's an anti-lag button to keep it singing, which we would need to try on empty roads or a track to get the best from.

It sounds as good as a modern turbocharged four is going to: not bad, with an occasional not-overly-antisocial pop here and there.

The suspension is running the same settings as a decade ago (when we liked it enough for four and a half road test stars), but AC will look at those next. The ride is pretty firm on bad roads but body control is great, and it steers terrifically well. The turning circle is sensible too. The good thing is how coherent it all feels.

This time, it will come at a price. There might be cheaper and less powerful versions later, but AC thinks this 380bhp E10 RZ will be £140,000 on the road. Which seems like a lot, but so does everything else: the BAC Mono and Dallara Stradale cost more; you can spend £100,000 on an Ariel Atom if you try.

A lot of perception will rest on the eventual fit and finish, something AC is typically extremely good at. We will know more next spring.

MATT PRIOR

TECH SPEC

ZENOS E10 RZ

New powertrain is explosive and handling is promising, but we can't yet say whether it can justify the massive price rise

Price £140,000 (est)
Engine 4 cyls in line, 1969cc, turbo, petrol
Power 380bhp at 6000rpm
Torque 376lb ft at 3000-4500rpm
Gearbox 6-spd manual, RWD
Kerb weight 790kg (est)
0-62mph 4.0sec (est)
Top speed 150mph (est)
Economy na
CO$_2$, tax band na
Rivals Caterham Seven 620, Spartan

UK VERDICTS

TESTED 11.9.25, OXFORDSHIRE **DELIVERIES** NOW

BMW M340i

Optimum version of one of the finest cars on sale has been updated

Big changes are afoot at BMW. The electric Neue Klasse, complete with minimalist styling and button-free iDrive, is looming, and from the spy shots it seems like the next combustion-engined 3 Series will have to follow suit.

Not just yet, though. Munich's mainstay is still here in 'G20' form, spending its 50th anniversary like it's just another day. It had a light facelift about a year ago, but we haven't checked in since with what has always been the most enticing version: the six-cylinder M340i.

The biggest news was a bigger battery for the 330e plug-in hybrid and some redesigned bumpers and lights. You can recognise the 2025 model by the four vertical 'cat's pupil' daytime-running lights that move further away from the classic quad round headlights and fall in line with the Neue Klasse EVs.

BMW has also gone off chrome, so accents like the exhaust pipe finishers are now gloss black.

There are some new wheel designs too. You can still get the handsome split-spokes from before, but most options are now fussier bi-colour designs like those seen here.

The main event of the M340i, the 'B58' engine, hasn't changed – it still makes 369bhp and 369lb ft, which is slightly less than what it puts out in the X3 M50 – and nor has the rest of the drivetrain, which still always features an eight-speed automatic gearbox and four-wheel drive.

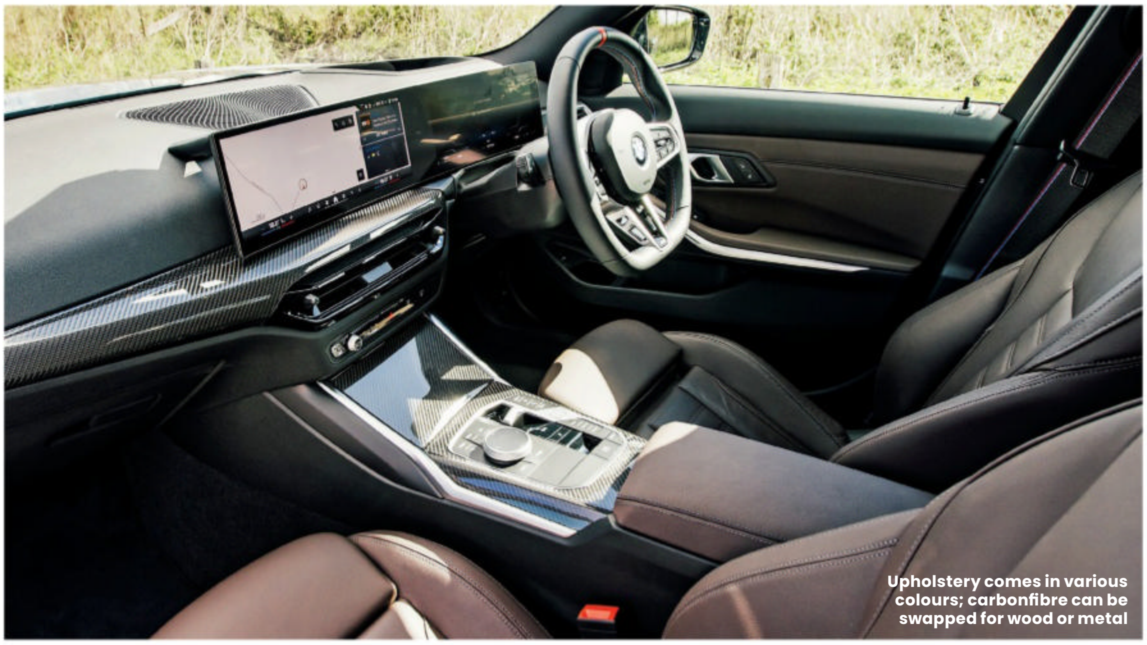
In some markets buyers have the option of a purely rear-driven M340i, but that's denied to us here.

Some cars are just limping along when they near retirement, but not the M340i. Enough has been said about this engine already; Stephen Dobie dedicated an entire feature to the thing in the 10 September issue, so I won't bang on about it here, but it's pretty wonderful.

The gearbox is worth a brief mention as well: it's just so smooth and responsive, even more so than

Performance is very strong indeed, yet it's fairly frugal

Set suspension to Comfort and TCS to Traction for the ultimate driving machine



Upholstery comes in various colours; carbonfibre can be swapped for wood or metal

TESTER'S NOTE

This is quite the start-up sequence: press Start; hold the Set button on the steering wheel to kill the overspeed warning; press Sport to kill the start-stop and turn on the rev counter; push up on the rotary controller to open the shortcuts, tap 'lane keep assist' to deactivate it, tap confirm. Aargh! **IV**

in the X3 or the M cars. And 40mpg with just mild-hybrid assistance is fairly remarkable.

BMW doesn't always get chassis right, but in the M340i with adaptive dampers (a £450 option, which is probably worth it for the Comfort setting), it's pretty spot on. Even in the softest mode, the ride feels more connected than the cloud-like feel of some Jaguars (RIP) or the Morgan Supersport, but it's very good in all circumstances: in town, on a B-road or on the motorway.

Combine this with outstanding seats that can give you a bum-on-the-floor driving position and this is a supreme way to cover miles.

Apropos, props to the press office for the classy blue over brown spec.

As usual, the Sport mode on the suspension can be ignored in the UK, with Comfort allowing just a hint of roll in the corners while maintaining compliance.

The steering is only medium-quick and nicely linear, giving just enough feedback.

"It's easily the car that best blends everyday comfort with genuine driver entertainment"

BMW's xDrive is naturally very rear-biased, and with the standard rear limited-slip differential, the M340i always feels keen to rotate into the corner on the power.

Turn the stability control to Traction mode or disable it entirely and power oversteer is on the cards.

Even so, I can't help wondering what it would be like on the 18in wheels (which have equal-width front and rear tyres instead of the staggered set-up of the 19in set) or with just rear-drive, because in the spec of this test car there is actually quite a lot of traction and you need to push through some understeer before the rear axle steps out in a slightly sudden manner.

Anyway, those are fairly niche concerns, and most of the time the M340i is a beautifully balanced car to flow down a twisty road.

In Touring estate form, with a bit more accessible luggage space, the M340i is easily the car that best blends everyday comfort and practicality with genuine driver entertainment. No wonder we named it the best car on sale two years ago.

And yet there is a slight nagging feeling. The same car but from four years ago would be the same but better. Because, in 2022, BMW couldn't help itself and had to mess with the interior, taking away useful buttons and making the infotainment more convoluted for no apparent gain. At least it still has the rotary controller and a more logical button layout than in other BMWs.

While the creeping 'enshittification' is frustrating, it still doesn't stop the M340i from being probably the best car on sale today on the strength of its powertrain, chassis and fundamental rightness of layout.

ILLYA VERPRAET

TECH SPEC

BMW M340i xDRIVE

In spite of slight interior annoyances, still an incredibly compelling sports saloon

★★★★★

Price £62,080
Engine 6 cyls in line, 2998cc, turbocharged, petrol, plus ISG
Power 369bhp at 5500-6500rpm
Torque 369lb ft at 1900-5000rpm
Gearbox 8-spd automatic, 4WD
Kerb weight 1725kg
0-62mph 4.4sec
Top speed 155mph
Economy 33.6mpg
CO_2, tax band 190g/km, 37%
Rivals Audi S5, Mercedes-AMG C43

AUTOCAR ROAD TEST 5775

POLESTAR 4

Can Polestar's sportified SUV-cum-coupé rival the class hegemony?

MODEL TESTED
POLESTAR 4 LONG RANGE SINGLE MOTOR
Price £60,000
Power 268bhp
Torque 253lb ft
0-60mph 6.8sec
30-70mph 5.5sec
Top speed 124mph (claimed)
70-0mph 48.5m (16deg C, damp)
Range 310/235/338 miles (average/touring/everyday)
Economy 3.3/2.5/3.6mpkWh (average/touring/everyday)
Weighted average charging rate 120kW

It has taken us a while to run the road test rule over the Polestar 4, but here we finally are, with an electric car that seeks to combine the minimalistic tech-luxury appeal of an Apple product with the automotive practicality of Tesla's Model 3.

Owners might also reasonably expect a good level of satisfaction from the driving experience. Until the recent arrival of the Porsche Taycan-rivalling 5, the 4 was the quickest car in the Polestar stable, and its platform is related to the one slid underneath the Lotus Emeya. The rakish design, which to our eyes neatly disguises the fact that the 4 is, strictly speaking, an SUV-coupé crossover, is also suggestive of handling appeal that ought to get the attention of BMW i4 owners.

We will now discover whether the Polestar 4 makes good on its considerable promise as an agreeably priced but desirable and versatile electric option. Or could its ambitious conception as a part-executive, part-SUV, part-sporting, tech-heavy crossover leave it in something of a no-man's land?

DESIGN & ENGINEERING

★★★½☆

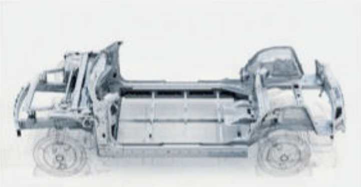
PROS Striking looks; good aero qualities; RWD option; big battery
CONS Slightly awkward silhouette

At 4.84m long and 1.53m tall, the 4 is comparably sized to not only the Porsche Macan Electric and the hotly anticipated BMW iX3 but also the Tesla Model Y.

However, see this Polestar in the metal and it is clear that it would sit quite comfortably alongside dedicated saloon alternatives such as the BMW i4 and Hyundai Ioniq 6, which have a similar footprint. The 4's coupé lines are strong, and that roofline is so low that it's actually only 2cm higher than that of the Mercedes-Benz EQE. In short, it is challenging to pigeonhole this car.

Polestar could have taken this car in any number of directions, at least as far as the silhouette went. The underlying platform is Geely's Sustainable Experience Architecture (SEA), which, as well as being the engineering bedrock for the Emeya, albeit in modified form, is also used for a number of Zeekr models, the Smart #1 and even the Volvo EM90 luxury MPV, which we don't get in the UK.

The platform can support electric motors at each end, and the 4 is available either in rear-drive Long Range Single Motor form or as the Long Range Dual Motor, which adds another motor at the front axle. Only the dual-motor model is available with the Performance Pack, which brings 22in wheels, a sportier tune for the electronically adjustable dampers from ZF and Brembo brakes that use sizeable, 392mm front discs and brightly painted calipers. What it doesn't bring is any more power, but the performance disparity between the two variants is already significant. The single-motor car, which we test here, makes 268bhp, while the dual-motor set-up hikes that to 536bhp – about the same as a BMW M3 CS.



Geely's SEA platform underpins the 4

Whichever version of the 4 you pick, the motor or motors are the same: a three-phase permanent magnet synchronous motor design, driving through a single-speed reduction gear transmission.

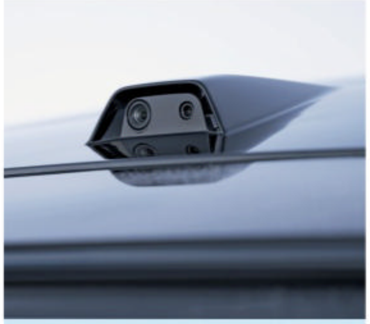
While the 5 is made largely from aluminium, the smaller 4, built in Geely's Hangzhou Bay plant in China, is more steel-intensive. The claimed weight of 2230kg is therefore unsurprising, and we weighed the car at 2247kg. By comparison, our scales logged the updated Tesla Model Y Long Range at 1921kg and the basic, rear-driven Porsche Macan Electric at 2220kg.

Some of that uplift is due to the European cars using batteries about 20% bigger in capacity than those of the Tesla. The Polestar's 100kWh unit uses NMC chemistry, contains 110 prismatic cells and is supplied by CATL. The maximum 200kW DC charging rate is par for the class.

Suspension is by double wishbones at the front and a multi-link rear. The rear-drive car, as here, controls matters with passive dampers and coil springs, while the dual-motor car has adaptive dampers with selectable Standard, Nimble and Firm modes. Polestar-branded products have in the past featured manually adjustable Öhlins dampers, but they always felt somewhat incongruous and don't appear here. Wheel choice is broad, with designs from 20in to 22in. In a nod to Polestar's performance positioning, tyres are supplied by either Michelin or Pirelli; our car uses the latter.

The 4's design has plenty of traditional premium touches: frameless doors, a striking rear light bar, retracting door handles and a panoramic roof, plus a wheel and tyre package that fills the arches snugly.

However, the big talking point is the lack of a rear windscreen. Why would Polestar chose to dispense with that, you may wonder? Its designers argue that, by doing so, they've been able to move the car's rear header rail backwards, lowering the roofline and extending the glass roof so it runs over the heads of the rear passengers, making the cockpit feel even more open and spacious, Tesla-style. It's a controversial move, but one that Polestar has repeated on the 5.



■ Polestar says the lack of rear screen gives an "immersive rear occupant experience". That's certainly one way of putting it. It also means your view backwards while driving is via this 2.5-megapixel HD camera, placed high and shielded from the elements.

■ Frameless mirrors, similar to those now used by Aston Martin, apparently generate 30% less drag compared with a traditional design. These ones have cameras in each arm and are heated as standard, with automatic dimming added as part of the Plus Pack.

INTERIOR

★★★☆☆

PROS Plenty of functionality; comfy up front; lounge-like atmosphere
CONS Too digital-heavy; second row feels unnecessarily dark

Slide into the driver's seat and there's a real sense that this is more coupé than SUV, owing to the geometry of the driving position – the relationship between hands, backside and feet – and the lowish scuttle ahead of you. You still sit higher than in 'classic' saloons or coupés, but not by much.

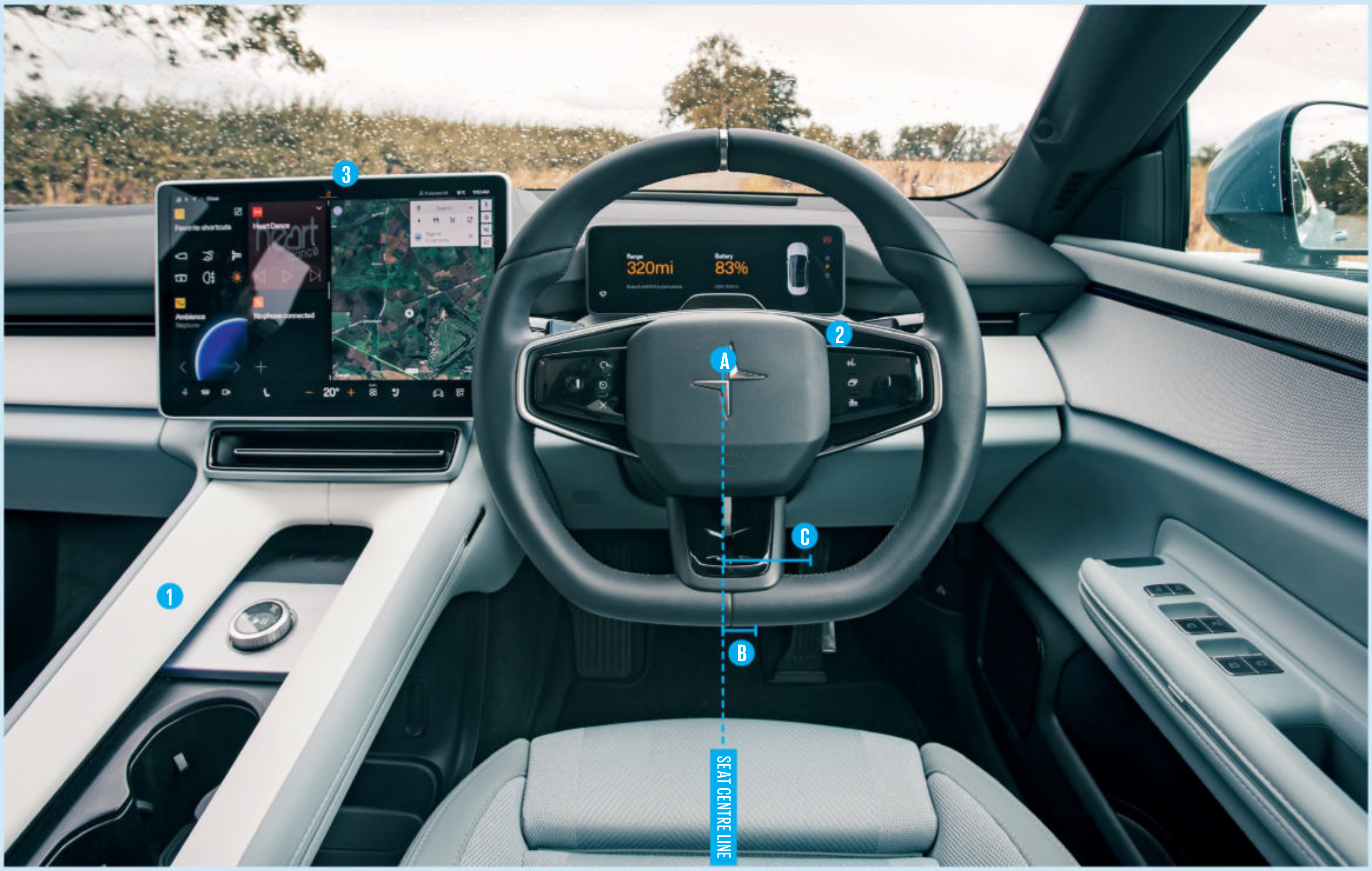
The dashboard has strong horizontal lines, complete with hidden vents that you adjust via the touchscreen (a frustrating way of doing it, all testers agreed). Thankfully, there's a simple instrument display behind the steering wheel, and if you add the Plus Pack, as our car had, you also get a head-up display.

The material palette is made up of some rather lovely textured textiles, or nappa leather if you prefer. There's certainly that unmistakable, restrained, Scandi-chic feel in the materials and design, and it feels refreshingly different from the obvious rivals ▶

① Architecture of the centre console is simple and strong, with two useful cupholders that can be hidden away. There's also a wireless phone charging pad ahead of the volume dial.

② Steering wheel commands can scroll through songs, change the view of the instrument panel and access the trip computer, but they feel cheap and don't always respond.

③ Central display runs Google's Android Automotive OS, first seen on the Polestar 2. Apps are downloaded from the Google Play Store, and in-built Google Maps works well.



WHEEL AND PEDAL ALIGNMENT Ⓐ Steering offset 0mm Ⓑ Brake offset 55mm right Ⓒ Accelerator offset 180mm right. Driving position is very much in the coupé or saloon style, rather than that of an SUV, and has plenty of adjustability via physical controls on the side of the seat.

◂ from Germany – which is another selling point for any Polestar fan who may well revel in a car that's anything but the norm.

As for comfort, fine seats have long been part of the Volvo-Polestar equation, and the 4 is no different. The padding is a little softer than you might expect, and the bolstering is a touch less generous than might sometimes be required of what is potentially a 500bhp-plus car, but for long drives and everyday use, these are superb and broadly adjustable. The simplicity of the driving environment is also welcome, although this approach does slip into functional issues: there is no physical control to adjust the mirrors, for example, and the indicator stalks don't always feel reassuringly sturdy. But does it all feel £60,000-premium? Mostly, yes.

There is fairly generous head room in the second row, at 880mm (920mm for the Model Y; 930mm for the Macan Electric), although not quite enough for particularly tall adults to sit without feeling a little enclosed, with the header rails dropping down on either side. The lack of a rear screen certainly adds to the sense of feeling slightly enclosed and dark, although there's good forward visibility, so no risk of it feeling outright claustrophobic.

However, from the driver's perspective it's just annoying not to have a direct view out of the back of the car. While the rearview camera that makes up for the solid metal shell at the back is high-definition, it's not as crisp and sharp as a regular mirror, and you can't use it like a mirror to judge distance by slightly moving your head, because a video camera gives no parallax effect. It's also problematic if you happen to wear glasses to correct short-sightedness, because you will need to look over your specs to focus on the screen, whereas with a mirror your focus is farther away.

You can recline the back seats, but doing so doesn't create any more space (although it does slightly lessen the impact of the Polestar's higher, EV-typical floor). However, overall, and as in the front of the car, material ambience is plush and luxurious, and for passengers of average height it's roomy enough.

The hatchback boot has a decent 526 litres of space, including 31 litres under the floor, so there's some useful SUV-ness in the mix. A 15-litre frunk adds further storage and is useful for the charge cable.

INFOTAINMENT

★★★½☆

PROS Crisp graphics; customisable layout; sensibly sized icons

CONS Some latency issues in our car; odd steering wheel controls

The car's landscape touchscreen uses a reskin of the infotainment software from the Volvo EX30, and there are some neat touches to it. The icons are sizeable, and the adaptive dynamic functions light up orange when they're activated, so they're not difficult to hit and it's easy to see how the car is set up. The climate controls are also permanently displayed along the bottom of the screen.

Configurable shortcuts on the home page mean lane keeping assistance, regenerative braking modes and more can all be a single finger prod away. The inbuilt Google Maps sat-nav is also very good, and you can have it showing on the driver display as well as the main screen if you choose.

Still, there are some properly irritating usability issues. Yes, you can choose what ambience you want according to planetary theme (pick your favourite planet and the car's ambient lighting adjusts accordingly), but you still have to go three or four prods into the menus to change some adaptive drive features and find ways to turn on your foglights or adjust a door mirror. It's not as hard to navigate as the EX30's system, but it's still not a user-friendly delight – and there's no mistaking that a few too many physical controls have been taken away by those who would worship at the altar of touchscreen technology. The steering wheel controls are also a bit fiddly to operate, and they don't have a premium feel.

PERFORMANCE

★★★☆☆

PROS Intuitively calibrated accelerator; some regen modes

CONS Straight-line pace borders on the lacklustre; regen selection

Polestar makes some very fast cars, but the single-motor 4 exists at the sedate end of the company's spectrum. Our tested 0-62mph of 7.1sec matches the claim exactly, and while it is plenty quick enough for the kind of driving in which these cars will mostly engage, something more exciting might have chimed better with the rakish overall aesthetic. Overtaking would also be easier if the 4 had some additional shove: its 5.5sec 30-70mph time actually looks pretty slow next to the 4.3sec of the rear-drive Tesla Model Y and 4.2sec for the basic Porsche Macan Electric over the same metric. There is always the dual-motor version, with its sub-4.0sec 0-60mph time.

Elsewhere, in everyday progress around town, it can be a bit hard to judge bringing the car to a smooth standstill. Brake energy regeneration is adjusted in the screen and has three settings – Off, Low and Standard – with Standard being a heavy one-pedal drive mode, Low being a fairly mild mid-level brake regen and Off being, well, off. It would be nice to have a slightly more varied range of regen, not to mention easier control of them via paddles on the wheel, with a couple of mid-range settings to choose between. As it is, the Standard regen is intuitive enough and easy to get used to, so most will most likely stick with that.

HANDLING & STABILITY

★★★☆☆

PROS Reasonably agile-feeling in normal driving
CONS Broadly unengaging; lacks body control on challenging roads

A rear-wheel-drive coupé-crossover from Polestar ought to have some intent about its handling, but in truth the 4 is fairly lukewarm.

There is nothing in particular that's 'wrong' with the driving experience: the steering is direct, of agreeable speed and ever accurate, and balance when cornering is easily established. However, there's little to get your teeth into, and the passive dampers often don't offer enough support on a challenging road. Of course, by opting for the dual-motor version with its three-mode adaptive dampers you can address that concern, but in our experience this causes ride quality to take a turn for the worse. In short, there's no sweet spot.

If one thing irks, it's that the EPAS lacks a sense of mechanical connection and has a feeling of being over-assisted, especially when compared with the more natural rack of the Macan Electric. The 4 doesn't display much in the way of fun-loving deftness when you put it through a series of bends, either. That it wears the same-size tyre on each axle feels like a compromise made to streamline the production process in favour of the dual-motor car. It's a shame, because in that latent balance the car displays, there is evident potential for something more entertaining.

All this needs to be put into context, of course. Driven in the way most owners will adopt, the Polestar 4 is cohesive and responsive. However, for anybody looking for that little bit 'more', as Autocar readers surely do, the overall experience is unmemorable.

COMFORT & ISOLATION

★★★★☆

PROS Quiet at a cruise; primary ride is often very supple indeed
CONS Lack of rear screen hampers visibility; low-speed reactivity

We have driven the 4 on all three wheel sizes, and the SEA platform's habit of thumping or shivering over sharp inputs is exacerbated as the diameter grows. Given the 4's limited appeal as a driver's car, most people will be best served by the 20in wheel and the 50-section tyre sidewalls it brings.

This combination is worn by our test car, which in the main rides very nicely. The softness that makes the handling a little underwhelming on a B-road translates to an indulgent primary ride quality when you just want to waft in comfort. Along with those excellent seats, it means the Polestar 4 is a fine motorway cruiser – among the very best in the class.

The trait is underscored by our recorded 63dBA at 70mph – 2dBA quieter than the Tesla Model Y and a match for the sturdier-feeling Porsche Macan Electric. At speed and away from more threadbare surfaces, it is a pleasure to while away the miles in the Polestar.

BUYING & OWNING

★★★⯪☆

PROS Plenty of equipment; competitive charging speeds
CONS Cruising range isn't that good; Model Y looms large

The entry-level Polestar 4 costs £60,000, but that is likely to increase with either £900 worth of Mist Tailored Knit upholstery or the £3100 Bridge of Weir leather. At least the Plus Pack is standard, with the Harman Kardon sound system, pixel-LED adaptive headlights and higher, 22kW AC charging rate, plus power-adjusting rear seats and other amenities.

The Polestar undercuts the £68,500 Macan Electric, then, but it can't match the German car's handling, performance or perceived quality. The entry-level Audi Q6 E-tron, starting at £60,515 in entry-level Sport guise, is perhaps a closer match, and we can see why somebody might elect for the Polestar's style and ambience over the Q6's better low-speed ride.

In terms of efficiency, damp weather during the 4's test wouldn't have helped, and a touring economy of 2.5mpkWh (versus 3.0mpkWh and 3.2mpkWh for the entry-level Macan and Model Y respectively) isn't great. Neither is an 'everyday' figure of 3.6mpkWh, but that does yield a reasonable 338-mile range.

In terms of charging speed, the Polestar's claimed 200kW is still respectable in a fast-improving environment. Between 10% and 90%, our test car's weighted average of 120kW bettered that of the Tesla, but it conspicuously trailed the Porsche's 163kW. ▶

FRONT Leg room 1120mm, head room 1070mm. No complaints about space in the front. The high centre console also yields a reassuring cockpit feel.

REAR Leg room 790mm, head room 880mm. Rear backrest can be tilted and it's not difficult to get comfortable here. Lack of rear window is odd.

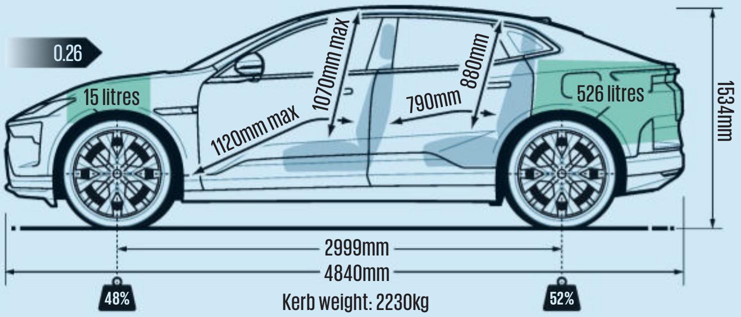
BOOT Length 970-1890mm, width 1050-1189mm, height 320-640mm. Boot capacity is fairly generous, and there's a split-level floor, plus lower cubby.

"Balance when cornering is easily established"

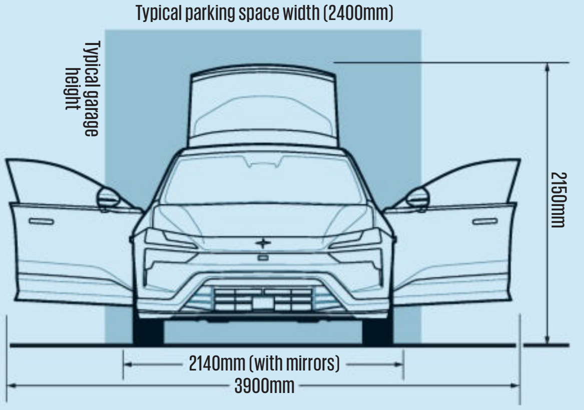
TEST RESULTS

DIMENSIONS

Length 4840mm **Width** 2140mm (with mirrors) **Height** 1534mm
Door span 3900mm **Max height to open bootlid** 2150mm

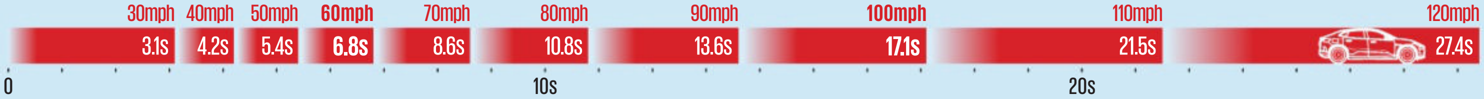

0.26
15 litres
1070mm max
880mm
790mm
1120mm max
526 litres
1534mm
2999mm
4840mm
48%
52%
Kerb weight: 2230kg

PARKING

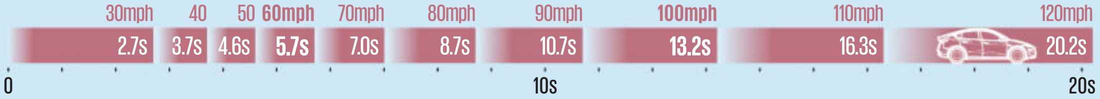

Typical parking space width (2400mm)
Typical garage height
2150mm
2140mm (with mirrors)
3900mm

ACCELERATION

Test conditions 16deg C, damp
Standing quarter mile 15.4sec at 95.2mph **Standing km** 27.6sec at 120.2mph **30-70mph** 5.5sec **50-80mph** 5.4sec **0-62mph** 7.1sec

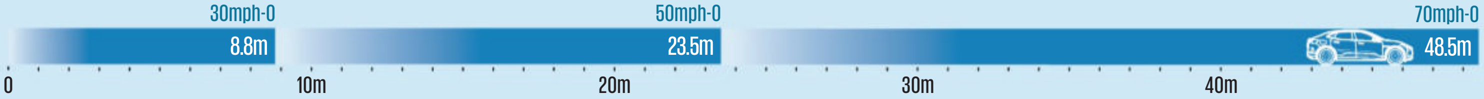


Tesla Model Y Long Range Rear-Wheel Drive (2025, 22deg C, dry)
Standing quarter mile 14.2sec at 103.6mph **Standing km** 25.5sec at 126.1mph **30-70mph** 4.3sec **50-80mph** 4.1sec

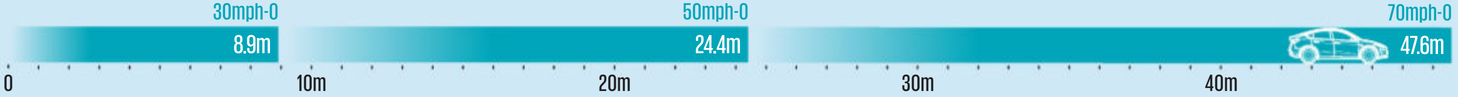


BRAKING

Dry 60-0mph 2.55sec

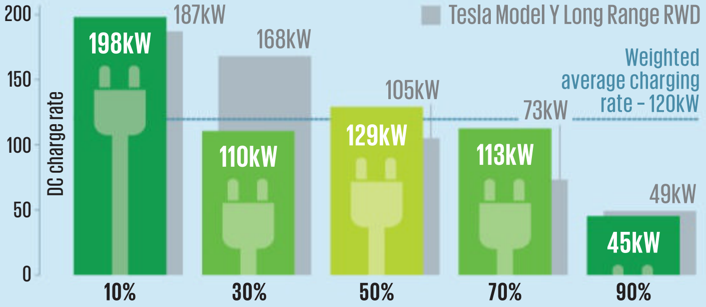


Tesla Model Y Long Range Rear-Wheel Drive (Dry 60-0mph: 2.63sec)



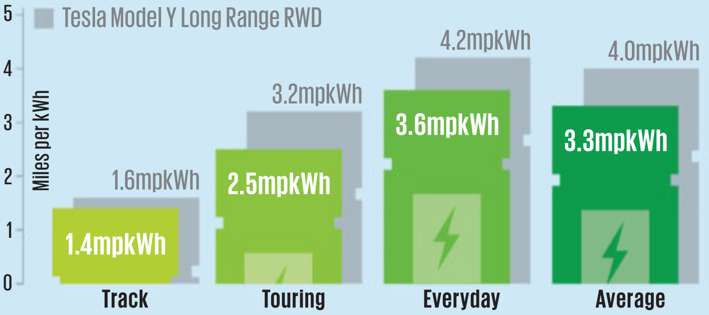
RAPID-CHARGING PERFORMANCE

Charging port location Nearside rear wing **Charger used** Hypercharger HYC 300, 300kW **AC charging** 11kW (22kW optionally)

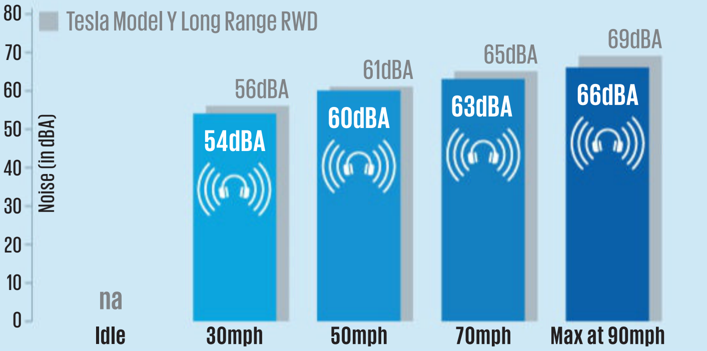


RUNNING EFFICIENCY

WLTP 385 miles, 3.4-3.5mpkWh (combined)
Test range 310/235/338 miles (average/touring/everyday)

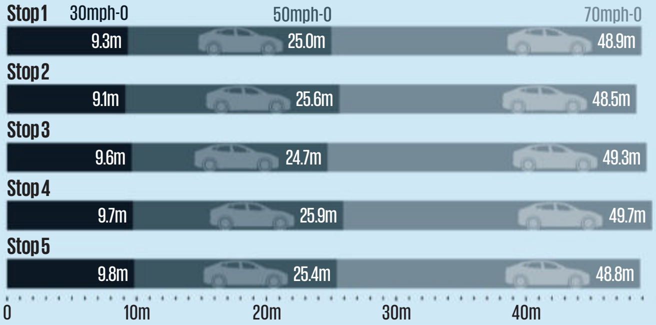


CABIN NOISE



BRAKING ENDURANCE

Fade variance 70-0m – stop 1 vs stop 5: -0.1m



PETER LIDDIARD

THE SMALL PRINT Power-to-weight and torque-to-weight figures are calculated using manufacturer's claimed kerb weight. Running efficiency is tested on a closed test track; 'touring' is representative of UK motorway driving, 'everyday' of intra-urban driving. Acceleration, braking and cabin noise are measured on reference surfaces, for cabin noise using a handheld decibel meter. Charging equipment may vary, but charger power always exceeds the advertised peak draw of the test car, unless stated. Second-row leg room is typical, measured behind a driver's seat set for 1000mm of leg room. © 2025, Haymarket Media Group Ltd. Test results may not be reproduced without editor's written permission.

MANUFACTURER'S SPECIFICATION

POLESTAR 4 LONG RANGE SINGLE MOTOR

On-the-road price £60,000
Price as tested £64,500
Value after 3yrs/36k miles £33,189
Typical PCP £603 pcm (£10,900 deposit + 36 months/18,000 miles)
Insurance group 45

FITTED EQUIPMENT

Standard 20in alloy wheels, 10.2in driver display and 15.4in central touchscreen, wireless 15W phone charging, eight-way electrically adjustable driver seat, heated front seats, parking sensors with 360deg camera, Microtech upholstery, LED headlights with active high-beam, adaptive cruise control **Optional** Metallic paint £1000, Plus Pack £0, Pilot Pack £1300, electrochromic glass roof £1300, Mist Tailored Knit with Zinc deco interior trim £900

MOTOR & BATTERY

Installation Rear, transverse, RWD
Type Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Power 268bhp
Torque 253lb ft
Battery type NMC
Capacity 100/94kWh (total/usable)
Voltage 400V
Power to weight 120bhp per tonne
Torque to weight 113lb ft per tonne

GEARBOX

Type 1-spd reduction gear

CHASSIS & BODY

Construction Steel unitary chassis, steel body
Weight/as tested 2230kg/2247kg
Weight distribution (f/r) 48%/52%
Drag coefficient 0.26
Wheels 8.5Jx20in
Tyres 255/50 R20, Pirelli P Zero Elect
Spare None (mobility kit)

SUSPENSION & STEERING

Front Double wishbones, coil springs, anti-roll bar **Rear** Multi-link, coil springs, anti-roll bar **Steering** EPAS, rack and pinion; 2.4 turns lock to lock; 11.6m turning circle

BRAKES

Front 364mm ventilated discs, two-piston calipers **Rear** 350mm ventilated discs, two-piston calipers **Handbrake type** Electronic, automatic

SAFETY

Euro NCAP rating 5 stars (2025) Adult occupant 92%, child occupant 85%, vulnerable road users 81%, safety assist 79%

EMISSIONS & TAX

CO_2 0g/km
BIK at 20/40% pcm £30/£60

VERDICT

Desirable but something of a missed opportunity

★★★☆☆

It's not difficult to see why somebody might be drawn to the Polestar 4. It is instantly recognisable as a car at the premium end of the class, and it is competitive enough in terms of range, charging speed and practicality. It is also, in its own quiet way, satisfying to drive during everyday tasks and has a memorable cabin ambience in the front.

The reason it doesn't score more highly here is partly down to its positioning. At £60,000 it is in the conversation with the Porsche Macan, whose driver appeal it can't touch, and the Audi Q6, whose all-round refinement it struggles to match, particularly at low speeds. The Polestar's case is not helped by the fact that the Tesla Model Y, which matches it closely on paper, costs a lot less. The lack of rear windscreen and an over-reliance on digital controls cements its modest score.

TESTERS' NOTES

RICHARD LANE
This is a striking bit of design inside and out, but I don't get the thinking behind the rear screen. Polestar does lounge-like, light-infused cabins so well, so why block out the back of the car, racing car-style?

MATT SAUNDERS
The 4's balance is okay, but I had hoped for a bit more natural poise from this rear-driven model. There's potential here, but for now the result is just a bit inert at the times when a Macan starts to get interesting. A staggered tyre set-up would be a good start.

FACELIFT FIXES

- Get a glazed rear screen back in the mix.
- Balance of digital and physical controls still needs redressing.
- Steering lacks a sense of mechanical connection.

RANKING RIVALS

	1	2	3	4		
	PORSCHE MACAN ELECTRIC Does more to satisfy the driver than anything else in the class. Solidly built and practical too.	**TESLA MODEL Y LONG RANGE RWD** Not without its own frustrations, but very capable and difficult to ignore at this price. Faster than the 4 too.	**AUDI Q6 E-TRON SPORT** Sibling to the Porsche flirts with being a touch ordinary but has refinement to spare. Very capable.	POLESTAR 4 LONG RANGE SINGLE MOTOR	**BMW iX3 50 xDRIVE** New-era BMW should be a game-changer and could vault to the top of the class when it arrives early next year.	**ALPINE A390** Crucial three-motor crossover could also disrupt the class in 2026 if it goes as well as we think it will.
	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★½☆			
Price	£68,500	£48,990	£60,515		£60,180	£67,000 (est)
Power, torque	335bhp, 415lb ft	295bhp, 302lb ft	248bhp, 332lb ft		463bhp, 342lb ft	466bhp, 596lb ft
0-62mph, top speed	5.7sec, 137mph	5.7sec, 125mph	7.0sec, 130mph		4.9sec, 140mph (est)	3.9sec, 155mph (est)
Range, economy	398 miles, 3.7mpkWh	311 miles, 4.1mpkWh	325 miles, 3.8mpkWh		500 miles, 4.1mpkWh	345 miles (est), na

AUTOCAR ROAD TEST 5776

HYUNDAI INSTER

Small EVs are suddenly all the rage. Here's one of the most intriguing

Having infiltrated every major class of car in the past 10 years, usually with no small impact, Hyundai's stated aim in 2025 is to double its European EV sales.

You can't accuse the South Korean company – the world's fourth-largest by volume – of lacking ambition, can you?

Key to achieving its goal is the launch of two models that will bookend the current range of mid-sized electric cars. At the serious end will sit the new Ioniq 9: a luxury seven-seat SUV that costs from £64,000, can be had with as much as 429bhp and presents as something of a Range Rover Electric for the people. At the little end is today's test subject: the Inster, all 3.8 metres of it, yours for £23,505.

Known as the Casper in Korea (where an appealing-sounding 1.0-litre petrol version is also sold), the car is assembled in Gwangju. In 2021, it became the first car to be built by a joint venture between Hyundai and the city government.

As has often been the case with Hyundai's European model launches, the timing of the Inster's arrival looks savvy. Petrol-powered superminis are dying out and electric alternatives are finally sprouting up to replace them, now that the cost of batteries and their energy density are at a stage that makes them commercially viable. The competition is growing, with BYD's Dolphin Surf, the Renault 5 E-Tech and a couple of Stellantis products already vying for dominance. The Dacia Spring and Leapmotor T03 bring further competition from even lower down the food chain, at less than £20,000.

If the Inster can bottle Hyundai-typical pragmatism, as well as having grown-up EV credentials and an easy drivability, it ought to do well. As for fun? Well, don't count it out. Small cars often have a simple joy about them and Hyundai has released a fanciful, WRC-inspired concept called the 'Insteroid', so there seems to be an awareness of this car's potential for mischief.

An N version may yet come. For now, how good is the regular car?

DESIGN & ENGINEERING

★★★⯪☆

PROS Compact footprint; quirky but strangely premium aesthetic

CONS Comparatively heavy for a traditional supermini

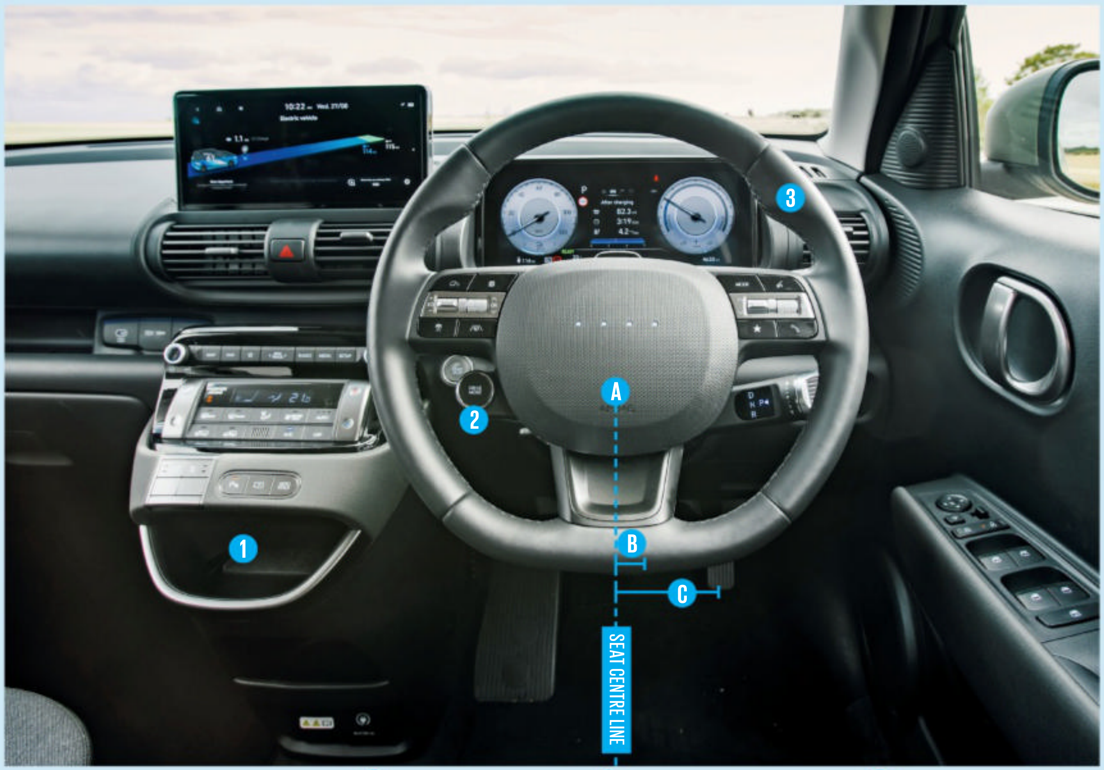
The Inster sits on Hyundai's K1 platform, which is an adapted ICE structure, unlike the electric-only E-GMP architecture that underpins the Ioniq models. That 3.8m length means it almost perfectly splits the difference between the Dacia Spring and Renault 5. However, it's taller than either of those cars, with a width much closer to that of the Dacia, which explains the Inster's slightly odd demeanour. As we will see, it's made for super-practicality.

MODEL TESTED
HYUNDAI INSTER 49KWH LONG RANGE 02
Price £26,755
Power 115bhp
Torque 108lb ft
0-60mph 9.6sec
30-70mph 8.8sec
Top speed 93mph (claimed)
70-0mph 47.2m (19deg C, dry)
Range 179/152/235 miles (average/touring/everyday)
Economy 3.9/3.3/5.1mpkWh (average/touring/everyday)
Weighted average charging rate 65kW

① Cupholders are integrated into the seat in a neat space-saving measure. Storage is better than expected, with two big cubbies beneath the air-con controls.

② Mode selector hangs from the steering wheel and cycles through Eco, Normal and Sport. As ever with Hyundai (unless you're in the Ioniq 5 N), the changes are pretty minimal.

③ The steering wheel is lifted directly from more senior Hyundais and feels a bit overbearing but is also far nicer than typical supermini fare.



WHEEL AND PEDAL ALIGNMENT Ⓐ Steering offset 0mm Ⓑ Brake offset 30mm right Ⓒ Accelerator offset 130mm right. Driving position is fairly commanding but not offensively perched, like in many a supermini.

The Inster rescues itself from looking like one of those odd, rare-groove imports thanks to the retro-esque pixel lighting that Hyundai has made its own, gratifyingly large wheel arches and neat, flat surfacing. It's not actually an unattractive car, and the Cross version – with more serious bumpers, skid plates, cladding and an optional roof basket – is redolent of the Giugiaro-era Panda 4x4.

Mechanically it's a simple affair. Whether you go for the standard, 42kWh battery or the 49kWh Long Range one (heat pump is standard in both cases) will determine whether the front-mounted motor makes 97bhp or 115bhp. Suspension is via MacPherson struts at the front and a torsion beam at the back.

We didn't have the chance to weigh the Inster but Hyundai is generally reliable with its claimed figure, and the 1335kg for the Long Range model compares well with the 1542kg of the smaller-battery (and now discontinued) Honda E. The larger, more lavishly appointed Renault 5 (equipped with a 52kWh battery) weighs 9% more; the 26.8kWh Dacia Spring 27% less.

Equally, compared with petrol cars of a similar size, the electric Inster is supremely heavy. The 1.0-litre Kia Picanto we tested last year weighed less than a tonne, and even Hyundai's own i20 N, replete with oversized wheel and tyre package, a limited-slip differential and a 1.6-litre turbocharged engine, officially weighs less than 1200kg.

INTERIOR

★★★★☆

PROS Excellent ergonomics; versatile seating; good storage
CONS Plenty of hard plastics; meagre boot space

Modularity is the theme inside. Every seat (there are only four in total) can be folded flat separately, allowing you to transport long items in a very small car. Unusually for this class, the rear bench also slides fore and aft by 160mm. It means that while the Inster typically furnishes back-row occupants with 570mm of knee room (Renault 5: 610mm), this can be expanded to 720mm if boot space isn't needed. Head room is also excellent for all, and there's enough adjustability in the driving position to ensure that the Inster doesn't feel like a kei car. In fact, it feels surprisingly mature, not least because it borrows switchgear and infotainment hardware from senior Hyundais. There's even ambient lighting.

You can't escape how narrow the car is, however, so taller and broad-shouldered passengers might not find it all that roomy up front. The seat bases are also shallow and the backrests lack a bit of lumbar support, though the fixed armrest offers comfort and the cupholders that sit underneath (they're fully integrated into the seat) are handy.

As for the infotainment, the digital dash is graphically strong and customisable, and the 10.25in touchscreen infotainment system is easy enough to use, though not as intuitive as the Google-based set-up in the Renault 5. It can also be a bit sluggish to respond to inputs and its Apple CarPlay and Android Auto functionality isn't wireless. This isn't Hyundai's top-tier system, but neither would you expect it to be.

As for hard plastics, there are of course plenty of those, notably around the dashboard and door cards. But they are forgivable on this occasion, and the cabin ambience is brightened by some interesting cloth upholsteries. ▸

■ The front of the Inster is impressively neat and has a clamshell-style feel to it that infers an unexpected premium-ness. The pixel lighting is borrowed from the Ioniq 5.

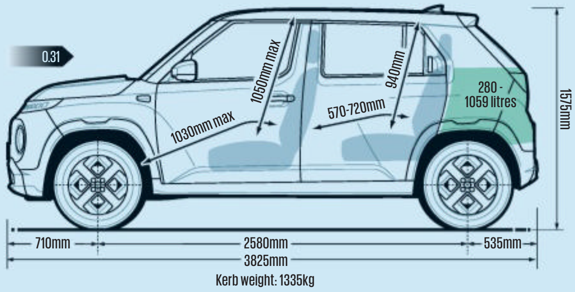
■ Wheel and tyre package is sizeable on our 02 test car, and we've seen Insters with Michelin Pilot Sport 5 rubber, no less. Sticking to 01 trim and 15in rims might improve the ride, mind.

PHOTOGRAPHY JACK HARRISON

TEST RESULTS

DIMENSIONS

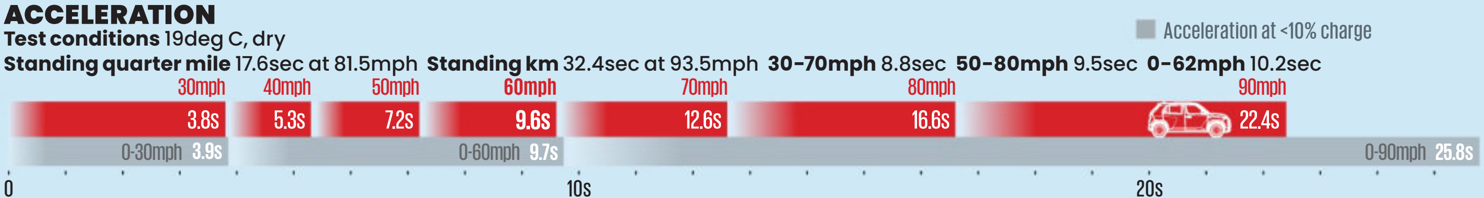
Length 3825mm **Width** 1860mm/1610mm (with/without mirrors) **Height** 1575mm **Door span** 3280mm **Max height to open bootlid** 2010mm



ACCELERATION

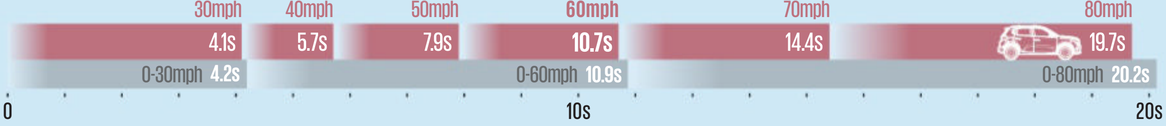
Test conditions 19deg C, dry

Standing quarter mile 17.6sec at 81.5mph **Standing km** 32.4sec at 93.5mph **30-70mph** 8.8sec **50-80mph** 9.5sec **0-62mph** 10.2sec



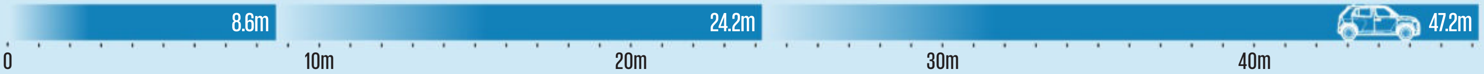
Citroën ë-C3 Max (2025, 15deg C, dry)

Standing quarter mile 18.3sec at 77.7mph **Standing km** 34.4sec at 83.7mph **30-70mph** 10.3sec **50-80mph** 11.8sec



BRAKING

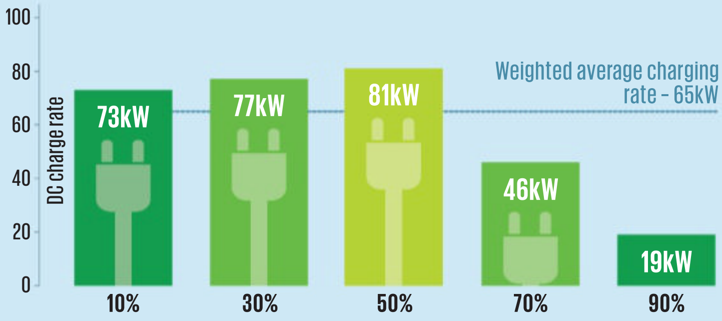
Dry 60-0mph 2.77sec



RAPID-CHARGING PERFORMANCE

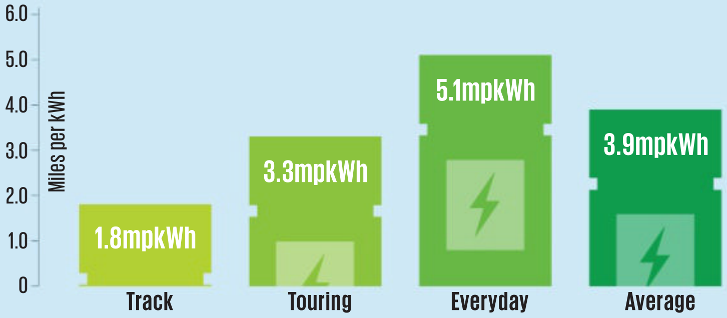
Charging port location Front grille

Charger used Hypercharger HYC 300, 300kW **AC charging** 11kW



RUNNING EFFICIENCY

WLTP 229 miles, 4.2mpkWh (combined) **Test range** 179/152/235 miles (average/touring/everyday)



MANUFACTURER'S SPECIFICATION

HYUNDAI INSTER 49KWH LONG RANGE 02

On-the-road price £26,755
Price as tested £27,255
Value after 3yrs/36k miles £13,566
Insurance group 24

MOTORS & BATTERY

Installation Front, transverse, FWD
Type Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Power 115bhp
Torque 108lb ft
Battery type NMC
Capacity 49/46kWh (total/usable)
Voltage 226V
Power to weight 86bhp per tonne
Torque to weight 81lb ft per tonne

GEARBOX

Type 1-spd reduction gear
mph per 1000rpm 6.1

CHASSIS & BODY

Construction Steel unitary chassis, steel body
Weight/as tested 1335kg/na
Wheels 6.5Jx17in **Tyres** 205/45 R17, Nexen N Fera Primus EV

SUSPENSION, STEERING & BRAKES

Front MacPherson struts, coil springs, anti-roll bar **Rear** Torsion beam, coil springs **Steering** EPAS, rack and pinion; 2.5 turns lock to lock; 10.6m turning circle **Brakes** 280mm ventilated discs (f), 262mm solid discs (r), sliding calipers

> “What the Inster lacks in pace it makes up for in maturity”

Inster
EJ25 CYV

PETER LIDDIARD

THE SMALL PRINT Power-to-weight and torque-to-weight figures are calculated using manufacturer's claimed kerb weight. Running efficiency is tested on a closed test track; 'touring' is representative of UK motorway driving, 'everyday' of intra-urban driving. Acceleration, braking and cabin noise are measured on reference surfaces, for cabin noise using a handheld decibel meter. Charging equipment may vary, but charger power always exceeds the advertised peak draw of the test car, unless stated. Second-row leg room is typical, measured behind a driver's seat set for 1000mm of leg room. © 2025, Haymarket Media Group Ltd. Test results may not be reproduced without editor's written permission.

PERFORMANCE

★★★☆☆

PROS Good spread of regen modes; intuitively calibrated power delivery
CONS Would struggle to pull the skin off a rice pudding

Performance? There is some, but not much. Our 115bhp test car beat the official 10.6sec 0-62mph claim by half a second or so and took 8.8sec to get from 30-70mph. Steady figures, then, but not off the pace for this type of car. By comparison, the Renault 5 Comfort needs 7.2sec for 30-70mph but is something of an outlier; the Citroën ë-C3 Max is more typical and needs 10.3sec. The Inster is in the conversation, then. Even so, overtaking requires some level of careful calculation, because while the Inster is responsive and reasonably sprightly off the mark, its ability to maintain a good level of acceleration is modest at best.

What the Hyundai lacks in pace it makes up for in versatility and, once again, a sense of maturity. There are no fewer than five regenerative-braking modes, selected via expensive-feeling paddles on the back of the steering wheel. These modes range from full coasting to one-pedal driving – something that can be regarded as a luxury in an EV of this size and price. The calibration of the driving controls is also good. Roll-on acceleration is neat (and a little sharper in Sport mode), and the brake pedal surprisingly firm.

Those brakes work well too. During an emergency stop, the Inster is hardly a picture of calm and composure (no car in this class is, as the suspension lacks control and the ABS intervention prefers efficacy to finesse), but the 47.2m stopping distance from 70mph is perfectly decent, and safe. It's worth noting that the Hyundai's 205-section tyres are wider than those of the Renault.

RIDE & HANDLING

★★★⯪☆

PROS Surprisingly pliant; capable of high-speed cruising; easy to place
CONS Fairly dull compared with the Renault 5; not immune to thumps

The Inster acquits itself well in the kind of low-speed urban driving it will be bought to tackle. In fact, the long-wave ride quality wouldn't feel out of place in the class above, and the crashing reactivity that bargain-priced city cars immediately tend to show when the road surface deteriorates is impressively well resisted. Our car, in 02 trim, wore the larger, 17in wheels, and it's reasonable to expect that the entry-level model, on 15in wheels, would have acquitted itself better still.

The strength of the car's basic ride quality translates to its cruising ability. The Inster will sit on the motorway with a reassuring gait that eludes many superminis, though you do get a bit of wind buffeting, owing to the height and narrowness of the body (a real benefit in the city). Even so, if your schedule involves the odd 150-mile drive, the Inster will cope well, thanks also to its grown-up cabin.

As for handling, the Inster's appearance sets low expectations, which are surpassed in certain respects but merely met in others.

The car grips well and is balanced when cornering, to the extent that on a steady throttle it's not immediately apparent whether it is the front wheels that are pulling you or the rears pushing. It is also easy enough to place on the road and in normal driving changes direction with a pleasing ease.

However, push on and the level of body roll becomes a distraction and the ESP's sporadic interventions make you wonder what's really going on underneath it all. It can be amusing to punt the Inster along a B-road for a short while, but in all regards the Renault 4 and 5 twins surpass it in a way that, to us, more than justifies their higher price.

BUYING & OWNING

★★★⯪☆

PROS Competitive range and charging speed; standard kit
CONS Far from a value proposition

With the 42kWh battery, 01 trim starts from £23,505. It makes the Inster some £3000 dearer than the government grant-aided Citroën ë-C3, although the Inster gets a lot more standard kit, including a heat pump, its pair of 10.25in digital displays and instruments, and adaptive cruise control.

The 49kWh battery (for a 229-mile range) raises the price to £26,755 and comes only in 02 trim, with heated seats and a heated steering wheel. It drops the Inster into the claws of the Renault 5, which is also now subject to a £1500 grant and so costs £25,495 even in top-ranking Iconic Five trim. The French car's interior is less versatile, but it is too strong for the Hyundai overall.

In terms of usability, our test car scored 5.1mpkWh for everyday efficiency (Renault 5: 5.0mpkWh) and 3.3mpkWh for motorway driving (Renault 5: 3.1mpkWh).

Meanwhile, against a claimed a maximum rate of 85kW, our car's weighted average from 10-90% state of charge was 65kW – roughly what you would currently expect in this class, and enough for occasional DC rapid charging at motorway services.

VERDICT

Dinky looks but a surprisingly grown-up and versatile ownership experience

★★★⯪☆

When the decision was made to bring the Inster to the UK, there was a dearth of truly affordable electric options and a government grant for certain cars wasn't on the cards. It means that, in the here and now, Hyundai's smallest EV probably isn't the value proposition its maker would have hoped it would be, and in such a price-sensitive class a couple of thousand pounds matters.

Nonetheless, the quirky-looking Inster is more capable and mature than many of its rivals, majoring on practicality and everyday comfort. It offers a lot for a little EV, and is worth considering.

RIVALS

RENAULT 5
From £21,495*
★★★★⯪

BYD DOLPHIN SURF
From £21,950
★★★★☆

FIAT GRANDE PANDA EV From £21,035
★★★★☆

4 **HYUNDAI INSTER**

*After EV grant

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MATT SAUNDERS

Testing, testing

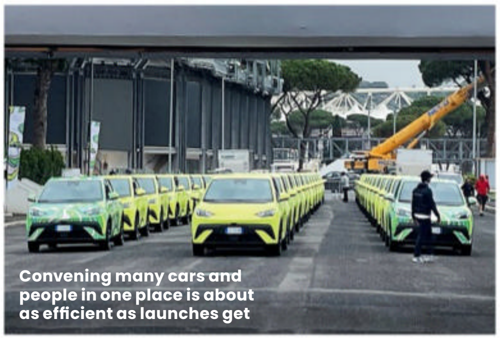
Rotterdam was deemed to be as good a place as any to launch the new Micra

When The Beautiful South wrote their song Rotterdam (Or Anywhere), they could have been writing about the itinerant life of a road tester.

Motoring hacks travel to locations that serve a particular purpose: to drive around in big circles. And then we go home. To the outsider looking in, I can well appreciate that you might wonder why it's done quite so.

The motoring press calls these events launches, although others might well describe them as junkets of a sort. A new model comes along and so many demonstrators are arrayed outside a generously sized hotel for us hacks to test and review – while benefiting from the hospitality of the manufacturer, to a greater or lesser extent, in order to do it.

Over days and weeks, different groups from different countries are flown in in orderly daily rotations. A press conference and a product briefing, a formal dinner and interviews with company executives are scheduled. You will probably get more than A Little Time – three to five hours – of driving done, mostly on the road, although some events include track sessions too.



Convening many cars and people in one place is about as efficient as launches get

> **“We did all question the thinking behind model launches”**

Very often, it doesn't matter too much where it all happens, because the location isn't really why we're there. For the recent Nissan Micra launch, it happened to actually be Rotterdam – although it could just as easily have been Rotherham, or indeed Liverpool or Rome.

Well, maybe not Rotherham. Hull might work: it has an airport and decent driving roads within striking distance. As the weather turns, however, southern European cities tend to be preferred. That's partly because manufacturers can avoid fitting winter tyres, which would affect the ride, handling and steering feel that the engineers have spent so long tuning.

So why not just do it at company headquarters? Or else ship individual cars to particular journalists? After the pandemic, we did all question the thinking behind launches – and there has been some worthwhile consolidation of such events post-Covid. The honest answer is that this is still the at-least-relatively easy, cost-effective way to manage it all.

If you're a car manufacturer, you want to publicise the market availability of your new model as widely, quickly and efficiently as possible. Shipping 20 cars to one place, hiring one venue, assembling what event resources are needed at that one venue and then flying people in to attend is actually cheaper and easier than shipping one car each to 20 different locations and then another 20, or travelling around the world in some year-long media circus.

By inviting them directly, a manufacturer also has more control over who in particular attends (at Autocar, launch invites are received and allocated centrally so as to avoid the impact of this) and the circumstances in which they do so than it would otherwise. This idea appeals to PR departments, who pay media agencies to tell them which reviewers in particular are the toughest and which are the most generous with their praise.

The most popular locations for launches are, right now, probably Lisbon, Barcelona, Nice and Frankfurt. But there are, occasionally, still grander jaunts about which you find Everybody's Talkin'. Mazda chose to launch the third-generation MX-5 in Hawaii in 2005 – a location only even remotely convenient for the company's own Japanese contingent, you would imagine. And I've personally travelled to different continents in order to test new Bentleys, McLarens and Land Rovers that I shouldn't really have needed to leave my own country – county, even – to drive.

So does the exotic, long-haul factor make you as a reviewer more inclined to award the Perfect 10? For me, it's quite the opposite. When a manufacturer is bidding hard for your approval or has lavished lots of event budget, I wonder if they're covering for something. If anything, it's your instinct to Keep It All In that you have to be aware of.

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25 FOR 25

Even by the fast-paced standards of the car industry, the first 25 years of the 21st century have been a period of incredible, tumultuous change. SUVs have gone from quirky oddities to dominating our roads, while EVs have moved out of science fiction and onto your driveways. We look back at the past quarter century through the prism of its 25 defining cars

25
FOR
25

Cars of the 21st century: 25 years and counting…

We're only 25 years in, yet the 21st century has already yielded a remarkable crop of game-changing new models. Here we pick the most significant so far

It might not seem like it to those of us of a certain age, but the turn of the 21st century happened quite a long time ago: 25 years, in fact – which is, conveniently, the sort of nice rounded number we can use as an excuse for a spot of reflection.

The past 25 years have given us a lot to look back on. When the 21st century began on 1 January 2001 (yes, we all celebrated the new millennium too early; look it up), SUVs weren't a thing, Ford had just bought Land Rover and Tesla had yet to be created because the idea of driving an EV remained a distant future fantasy.

Our goal here was to pick the 25 cars that have defined the first 25 years of the 21st century. Not the best, fastest or bigger-selling – instead, these are the most significant machines. We have picked one car for each year, and we set a rule that each brand can only feature once.

Would you choose anything differently? Email autocar@haymarket.com or visit our social media channels to let us know.

2001 Mini hatch

Reinventing an icon is fraught: there will always be those who say the new one isn't 'proper'. When the Mini was revived under the auspices of BMW (but largely developed by what remained of MG Rover), some said it was too big, too expensive and not clever enough. Today, 25 years on, it's clear that the modern Mini's direction as a small, fun-to-drive, retro-styled premium car was spot on.

The concept is straightforward, but the Mini's brilliance rests on some clever engineering. VW's New Beetle was a Golf in drag; the Mini sat on its own platform, which allowed the designers and engineers to go to town on the styling and packaging and make it properly fun to drive.

Frank Stephenson's design hit just the right notes of retro and modern: it was accessible without being boring and clearly referenced the Issigonis original without being slavish. The design hasn't dated, either, and today the Mini is as comfortable in its 1950s-inspired skin as it was 25 years ago.

The styling gave the new Mini mass appeal, but the dynamics ensured it kept the enthusiasts on side. Wheels pushed out to the corners, a stiff structure and quick electrohydraulic steering created what our 2001 road test called "one of the best front-drive chassis we've come across".

What makes the Mini significant is that it showed how to do retro right (while many others showed how to do it wrong): with a strong product that was tailored for the 21st century. It did it so right, in fact, that it laid the foundations for what is now an entire brand. **IV**

2002 Porsche Cayenne

Before the Cayenne arrived in 2002, Porsche sold only sublime but not always profitable sports cars. The Boxster had rescued the firm from oblivion a few years prior, but in order to truly thrive, Porsche needed to diversify further.

BMW's X5 proved a 4x4 could double as an executive express; Porsche set out to prove an SUV could also be a supercar. Enter the Cayenne.

With up to 450bhp and 457lb ft from a twin-turbo V8 and a 0-62mph time in the mid-fives, the Cayenne was one of the fastest five-seaters of its day. It could handle, too: trick diffs and power-management electronics aided performance in corners, while the four-wheel drive system's hefty rear bias channelled the spirit of the 911.

Its ride in town was good, there were three proper seats and a big boot in the back and it could follow a Discovery down off-road tracks.

It was nothing short of a revolution. Today, the Cayenne consistently tops Porsche's global sales charts, and now there's an electric version around the corner to do it all again. Leave your prejudices at the door. **FP**

2004 Aston Martin DB9

The very identity of the Aston Martin DB9 is a fine example of how carefully nomenclative model history is written by the car industry. Back in the early noughties, it was decided that the replacement for the popular DB7 couldn't possibly be called the DB8, lest anyone mistakenly assume that this V12-engined grand tourer might be powered by nothing more than a lowly V8. Today, its latest successor is called the DB12. And guess what kind of engine that uses...

Beneath its skin, the DB9 really was the first Aston Martin of the modern era, blooding as it did the company's all-aluminium Vertical-Horizontal model architecture when it entered production in 2004. As such, you could say every DB, Vantage and wider Aston Martin model that followed it for more than a decade – from DBS to Virage to Rapide and eventually even on to the second-generation Vanquish – all flowed off its platform.

The DB9 represents Aston Martin in its most bold and expansive of moods, at a time when it had former Porsche executive Ulrich Bez at the helm and the financial clout of Ford and the Premier Automotive Group behind it, fuelling the corporate optimism. It broadened Gaydon's horizons and showed which way the future lay. **MS**

2003 Rolls-Royce Phantom

Having revived one classic British brand with Mini, BMW repeated the trick a few years later at the opulent end of the car market. The subsequent incredible success of the seventh Rolls-Royce Phantom kick-started a new era for a marque whose very name is a byword for luxury.

The Phantom was in fact the product of a new firm – Rolls-Royce Motor Cars – created by BMW. The old Rolls-Royce Motors essentially fed into Bentley, with the Volkswagen Group buying both from Vickers in 1998. Except Vickers didn't own the Rolls-Royce brand name: the aerospace company did, and BMW did a licence deal (later buying other brand assets from the VW Group).

In 2003, both firms entered bold new eras: Bentley with the Continental GT, Rolls-Royce with the Phantom. The latter used a BMW 6.5-litre V12 and other components but sat on its own bespoke platform. Prices started from £250,000 and production ran for nearly 15 years. Rolls-Royce has slowly added to its product line and grown, and the stately, fabulous Phantom remains the heart of the brand. **JA**

2005 Bugatti Veyron

Ferdinand Piëch's legacy looms large. The long-serving Volkswagen Group head was known for his affinity with experimentation, and it's a characteristic that resulted in the two-time Le Mans-winning Porsche 917, the ultra-slippery C3 Audi 100 and the 261mpg Volkswagen XL1.

For those creations alone we must be thankful, but of all the enigmatic Austrian's commendable feats of engineering, the Bugatti Veyron will forever be the best known and most impactful. It was at launch the world's fastest and most powerful production car – and only a handful of new cars in the subsequent 20 years could beat it in a game of Top Trumps. Its headline figures still sound like the preserve of some cartoonish fantasy machine: 8.0-litre W16 engine, four turbos, 1479bhp, 268mph, £2 million... Oh, and an exorbitant development bill of around £1 billion, meaning all 450 examples were sold at a loss to the Volkswagen Group. But who puts a profitability figure on their bedroom wall?

Right up there with Concorde, the Flying Scotsman and the International Space Station as an era-defining feat of engineering, the Veyron will be remembered as a monument to the pursuit of absolute mechanical supremacy and a reminder that truly great things can be achieved when the company accountants are sent home early. **FP**

2006 Nissan Qashqai

When Nissan began to develop a European-honed replacement for the unsuccessful Almera family hatchback, the early focus was on a compact MPV – but worries over its commercial potential prompted a shift in direction. Nissan engineers spotted the growth in popularity of larger SUVs and thought that could be applied to the C-segment – and since it was a family car, it didn't really need the off-road ability or rugged cladding of a category that had been developed from 4x4s.

Development was, for the first time for a Nissan, led by the firm's UK technical centre in Cranfield, and the result was a machine with the coveted big wheels and high ground clearance and seating position of a larger SUV but without the go-anywhere ability that few people needed.

European production took place in Sunderland, and within a year Nissan had sold 100,000. Rivals took note, and now every mainstream car firm has its own compact crossover – most of which are still referred to as Qashqai rivals. **JA**

2007 Fiat 500

When it finally went off sale last year, after 17 years and more than 2.5 million units sold, the reborn Fiat 500 still didn't look like an old car.

Well, it did, of course. It was meant to – that was the whole point. But the design wasn't tired or played out; the recipe still felt fresh and it still held huge commercial appeal. The fact that its replacement, due on sale later this year with new tech and hybrid power, looks basically the same is testament to the staying power of this cutesy, 1950s-inspired silhouette.

Nobody will look back on it more fondly than Fiat's bosses, who might have found themselves out of a job years ago were it not for the roaring success of the 500. Before 2007, Italy's oldest car maker was in a bad way: the company was poorly managed and its cars were plagued by design and quality issues that turned buyers away from the showroom in droves. From holding half of the Italian car market in 1990, it had dropped to a share of just a quarter by 2003. Much was riding on the 2007 replacement for its smallest car, the Seicento.

Using existing architecture in a new, tightly packaged format, the Frank Stephenson-designed 500 was cheap to develop and cheap to build – which meant it was cheap to buy. But its retro-modern looks and style-conscious trimmings meant it also had the sort of premium cachet that had hitherto been largely absent from the city car class. It also drove with a zip and verve reminiscent of its 1957 namesake. The 500 was a true people-pleasing proposition, and it remained a recommendable contender as rivals came and went.

No surprise that Luca de Meo, who led the 500 programme, would later deploy a similarly conceived revival of the 5 in his ground-up reinvention of Renault. If it ain't broke… **FP**

2008 Ford Fiesta

Meet Antonella, a 25-year-old physiotherapist who lives in London and buys her clothes at Topshop. She argues endlessly with her friends about which brands are hot (or not), but they all agree the iPod is brilliant.

Antonella, thought Ford, was the perfect customer for the sixth-generation Fiesta. She didn't really exist, but the creation of this imaginary amalgamated embodiment of young, fashion-conscious female demographic represented a dramatic shift in how the company devised its cars and tapped into a more progressive, youthful audience. This remarkable gamble yielded an edgy, futuristic design when most rivals had gone blobby: the new Fiesta was Frutiger Aero on wheels.

Despite focusing on Antonella, Ford didn't betray its commitment to dynamic excellence – fun cars are for everyone, after all. The Fiesta was easily the best supermini of the time to drive, and in hotter ST form it earned a place in the pantheon of hot hatches.

The combination brought unprecedented success. The sixth Fiesta was the UK's best-selling car in every year of its life and remains a mainstay of British roads. Sadly the Fiesta is no longer with us, and neither is the iPod, but thanks, Antonella. **CM**

2009 Ferrari 458 Italia

We had all experienced and enjoyed a good decade and a half of mid-engined Ferrari before the arrival of the 458. The F355 was loved, the 360 Modena was also good and the F430 had been terrific.

But when it came to replacing the last of those three, Ferrari already knew that a new McLaren would also be coming – a rival with a mid-mounted V8 engined and a carbonfibre tub, produced by Maranello's well-funded and biggest rival in motorsport. Ferrari knew, in short, that the 458 Italia would have to be something special.

It was exactly that. When it arrived, the 458 felt like it moved the game on by a generation and a half. Our senior road tester Jamie Corstorphine (ironically now McLaren's product strategy director) said at the time: "It is a truly exceptional achievement." The 458 was a car that the MP4-12C couldn't live with, and it set a tone that competitors have been playing catch-up with ever since. **MP**

2010 Mercedes-Benz SLS AMG

The Mercedes-Benz SLR McLaren was an unusual beast that blended the supercar, hypercar and grand touring genres in a large – and very expensive – technological showcase. But Mercedes could only sell two-thirds of the planned production, and so its successor was designed to be a very different car.

Instead of straddling sectors and being complicated by involvement from McLaren and Gordon Murray, the SLS was conceived as a purer sort of supercar. It was half the price of the SLR and, most significantly, was the first model developed from the ground up by AMG.

The SLS ushered in a new era of Mercedes design language, featured the world's most powerful naturally aspirated production engine in the form of the 563bhp 6.2-litre 'M159' V8 and had stunning gullwing doors.

The SLR had, to a degree, lacked identity, but there was nothing uncertain about the SLS: it was a supercar through and through. Performance was essentially identical to the significantly more powerful SLR, and in our testing it outpaced a Ferrari California to 100mph by 1.2sec. It had the drama and the looks to match, being wider than an S-Class and boasting an extra 112bhp over the already over-the-top C63 AMG. We said it felt like "a hot rod polished to the nth degree", which is exactly what an AMG should feel like. **AW**

HOW WE DID IT

Picking the most significant cars isn't easy: we were looking for models that had a major impact on the industry, whether by commercial success, pushing performance or influencing design trends.

The Autocar team was invited to list contenders for each year; from the long list that resulted, we then picked one car for each year. The one-car-per-brand rule did complicate things at times, because some firms have produced several significant models over the past 25 years, but it was less of an issue than you might think. Besides, we weren't short of contenders.

If anything, the biggest challenge was determining a car's significance: it's a relative term, after all. It became harder when we were choosing cars for the more recent years: occasionally time provides a clearer context. The Ineos Grenadier, for example, was on the shortlist for 2023, but it's the future success of that firm that will determine whether the Grenadier will be a significant milestone or a transient curio.

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2011 Range Rover Evoque

The Range Rover Evoque's arrival marked a significant shift for Jaguar Land Rover. As one of the early premium compact SUVs, it was stratospherically successful for the company, catapulting it into an entirely new buyer base. It soon accounted for one-third of Land Rover's sales, and while it remains a premium product, the sight of so many of them on the roads shows the Evoque has also entered the mainstream.

The flagship Range Rover may be far more profitable in terms of price per unit, but the Evoque elevated Jaguar Land Rover in a way none of its models managed to do afterwards – until the new Land Rover Defender came along.

For further evidence of the impact the Evoque had, think back to when Land Rover added a convertible to the line-up. It was short-lived (39 of them are for sale on Autotrader at the time of writing, if you're in the market), but the fact that a cabrio was even deemed worthy of production reveals the significance of the Evoque at the time.

The current Evoque is only the model's second generation, launched in 2018. There have been plenty of facelifts since, but it's due an overhaul (despite its looks ageing well) and an all-new model is expected in the next couple of years. **RB**

2012 McLaren P1

When Ron Dennis revealed the P1 at the 2012 Paris motor show, we knew we were looking at a piece of the future. What we didn't realise was just how much this flagship supercar – McLaren's first since the F1 – was rewriting the playbook for the future of its breed. Turbocharging, a carbonfibre monocoque, hybridisation and active aerodynamics: the P1 had it all, wrapped in 'biomimicry' bodywork whose lines took inspiration from sharks and manta rays. It was a visionary product that still feels contemporary today. As does its performance: we extracted a 2.8sec 0-60mph from the P1, and a decade on the Ferrari 296 GTB only went one-tenth quicker.

Another facet of the P1's genius is more subjective than any of the extraordinary hardware or breathtaking speed. McLaren had thrown the kitchen sink at this supercar in terms of engineering complexity, and yet it remains joyful to drive. It had verve and mischief and exploded the myth that McLarens were effective but dull. Hallelujah! There is fun in the gene pool! It was something McLaren would later tap into, notably with the 600LT.

The big picture, of course, is that the P1 signalled the true arrival of fresh-faced McLaren Automotive as a force. Ferrari had the LaFerrari, Porsche had the 918 Spyder and the guys from Woking had an answer to both of those cars. The P1 was the moment McLaren became a player. **RL**

2013 Volkswagen Golf

Cracking the difficult second album is one thing, but nailing the third is harder still. And then there's the fourth and fifth to worry about.

But a seventh? How could that possibly be as groundbreaking or as genre-shaping as the smash-hit original? It's Dig Out Your Soul versus Definitely Maybe: no contest. So it's frankly extraordinary that the seventh-generation Volkswagen Golf stands proud as the high point of a legendary lineage that stretches back for more than half a century.

Making huge strides over its predecessor in terms of material quality, refinement, athleticism and efficiency, the Mk7 Golf was an expensive-feeling and massively versatile rebuttal to the notion that affordable family cars couldn't be desirable. The Focus, Astra, Corolla and Civic simply could not keep up.

And this era of GTI – particularly the facelifted Mk7.5 version – is perhaps the absolute zenith of sporting VWs. Expertly achieving the near-impossible balance of value, accessible driver reward, raw desirability and everyday utility, it is the closest any car has come in recent years to perfecting the hot hatch formula and remains a benchmark for the segment even now. **FP**

2014 Mitsubishi Outlander PHEV

Drive a modern hybrid or electric vehicle and there are a great many things you will take for granted – and the Outlander PHEV played a significant role in popularising many of them.

Paddles to adjust the brake regeneration; a smartphone app with nifty features such as turning on the headlights from afar; the ability to run as a range-extender: all were seen on this early plug-in hybrid SUV.

It may not have been the most scintillating thing to drive, but as a technological showcase – and a more palatable route into electrification for the masses, when the Nissan Leaf had a range of less than 100 miles – it deserves a place among the most influential cars of the 2010s. **CM**

THE EASIEST YEARS TO PICK – AND THE HARDEST

The easiest year to pick was in fact the first one: the new Mini of 2001 was the first entry written on our list, and nobody could suggest a credible alternative (although one team member did argue for the MG ZT). The next easiest pick was 2024: some great cars came out last year, but surely none as truly game-changing as the Hyundai Ioniq 5 N.

Other years were far harder: 2013 included the Tesla Model S, the Toyota GT86, the hypercar 'holy trinity' and a step-change Ford Fiesta ST. Some years, meanwhile, were somewhat shorter on key contenders: 2016's shortlist included the Jaguar XE and Toyota C-HR.

2015 Bentley Bentayga

Porsche pioneered the luxury SUV long before most of its competitors, back in 2002. But when Bentley's equivalent arrived 13 years later, as SUV popularity had definitively taken hold, Matt Prior observed: "Bentley has established a reputation as a maker of sporting cars that must also be luxurious. It's hard enough to make a luxury saloon that can do the thick end of 200mph in safety and security, while retaining the 'luxury' part of the tag. Now throw on top of those demands the additional need for this vehicle to travel into sand dunes or to tow several tonnes of horse and trailer, and you start to appreciate the task Bentley has set itself."

Happily, he concluded: "The Bentayga fulfils with ease one of the widest remits ever given to a car. Terrific performance and refinement." Ten years on from its arrival, the Bentayga has benefited from a significant update and accounts for an unsurprising and significant 40% of overall Bentley sales. **RB**

2016 Seat Ateca

The Ateca somehow managed to reinvigorate Seat while sparking its decline. Before the Ateca, the Spanish company ticked along as the Volkswagen Group's vaguely sporty brand, selling plenty of Ibizas and Leons. But its first SUV was a game-changer, attracting new, mainstream buyers to the brand. For a while, the Ateca was the family SUV to have.

But boss Luca de Meo was frustrated that there was a limit on how much buyers were prepared to spend on a Seat, and that hampered the Ateca's profit potential. So he expanded the Cupra performance line into a full-on brand, starting with a souped-up, rebadged Ateca. It worked, and while Seat still ticks along, the focus is now on Cupra. **JA**

2017 Tesla Model 3

Tesla's story began sedately. We used to see Roadster prototypes, those Lotus-developed sports cars, whizzing around the test tracks we use, and we saw them as something of curiosity. It was followed by the quite credible Model S and, later, the gullwing-doored Model X. But Tesla was still on the edge of the mainstream industry. The Model 3 changed all of that. It was a Tesla for the mainstream – once they had worked out how to build them in larger numbers.

Some traditional industry players were having a naff time after their diesel cheat devices had been discovered. So with Tesla's reputation as a squeaky-clean Silicon Valley disruptor, with a charismatic leader who wasn't (then) perceived as a liability, and having made an investment in the Supercharger fast-charging network that even today just about gives the brand competitive appeal, the Model 3's success was set. It was the world's top-selling EV between 2018 and 2020, before that place was taken by the Model Y.

Things have been, er, interesting since, but the Model 3's role in driving widespread EV acceptance secures its position as one of the most significant cars of this century. **MP**

2018 Jaguar I-Pace

It's hard to believe that Jaguar is already edging towards the start line of one of its semi-regular 'bold new eras', given that the launch of the I-Pace – its most outlandish and transformative new car in decades – still feels so recent.

Even eight years after it was revealed, the I-Pace doesn't feel particularly outdated on paper: with an official range of nearly 300 miles, a fast charging speed of 100kW, 394bhp and a sub-5.0sec 0-62mph time, it's still just about competitive with today's more mainstream crop of electric cars – although it is outpaced by the newer entrants into the premium electric SUV segment that it in effect created.

It was pivotal in proving that electric cars could be truly desirable and capable, rather than dreary and compromised. And, unlike its American contemporary of the time, it didn't need party tricks such as gullwing doors and a 'Fart mode' to curry favour with early adopters.

Instead, the I-Pace was simply a convincingly classy premium SUV that happened to be electric: it was airy and luxuriously appointed inside; its striking, cab-forward silhouette looked the business; and it far outpaced anything else without an engine for dynamic appeal, effectively masking its 2300kg kerb weight to offer agility and responsiveness on a par with the best sports saloons of the time.

Jaguar beat its rivals to the punch with the I-Pace; had it followed up that success sooner, it might not need its impending bold new era. **FP**

2019 BMW 3 Series

As Golf is to hatchback and Defender is to SUV, so surely is 3 Series the absolute byword for executive saloon. Now well into its 50th year on sale and approaching an eighth generation of reinvigoration, this BMW remains an embodiment of everything Munich does properly. In so doing, it is perhaps one of the best-rounded and most versatile cars on sale anywhere in the world today.

Today's G20-generation 3 Series is already seven years old (how did that happen?) but is still so dynamically rewarding, thoughtfully packaged, well built and practical that there is really no reason to stop hailing it – in its various forms – as the definitive premium mile-muncher. An electric powertrain, a new platform and a totally new look beckon next year, and while the next iteration will move the game on yet again, we will no doubt always look back on the current car as a 3 Series high point with timeless appeal – maybe one day bestowing upon it classic status comparable to that of the E30. **FP**

2020 Land Rover Defender

The 'new' Defender shows what works for the modern JLR – or just Land Rover, if you prefer still to think of it that way.

The Defender has integrity and authenticity as a product because it's brilliantly versatile and capable; it also has a bit of the retro-cool positioning that has so often helped to sell cars in big numbers since the turn of the century. But it's studiously modern; it's comfortable, safe, refined and fully featured, with just a hint of luxury, a wide choice of powertrains and every digital convenience you could want.

Much agonising and teeth-gnashing went on during the conception of this car, because Land Rover knew it was remodelling its own crown jewels. But the remarkable commercial success of the design that JLR chose is all the justification needed to show that it was the right car. In 2024, when the Defender had fully nine in-house JLR model rivals with which to compete (before the Jaguars ended production, at least), the Defender accounted for more than one-quarter of all JLR sales.

Above all else, the new Defender has proven that, even where JLR's most unique and purposeful cars are concerned, bold and outstanding design really does the business for Gaydon. And given what's going on with the Jaguar brand at the moment, that's a message that could hardly be better timed. **MS**

2021 Kia EV6

It has become almost a cliché to compare fawningly the Kia of today with the unknown brand that pitched up on our shores in 1991 with a rebadged Mazda 121 and an unblinking focus on affordability above all else.

This is a company that now commands a huge 4% share of the European market, with a wide spread of segment-leading cars, some of which hold real premium cachet – and no car has embodied that meteoric rise quite as well as the EV6. Kia's first bespoke EV didn't just prove itself worthy of consideration for electric SUV buyers; it all but redefined the segment standards for style, athleticism and efficiency, not to mention range and charging speed.

With a chassis that struck a balance between poise and refinement, a tech-heavy cabin that had more than a whiff of spaceship about it, and a spread of powertrains that catered to mile-munchers and speed demons alike (the range-topping GT has more power than the Porsche 911 Turbo), the EV6 set new standards for its maker and raised the bar for mainstream EVs. **FP**

2022 MG 4 EV

The MG 4 kick-started a dramatic turnaround for not only its maker but also the fortunes of the broader electric car market.

If you wanted an EV just three years ago, your choice was either to pay well above £40,000 for something with a range that barely edged 300 miles or to save some money and accept a car that could do hardly more than 100 real-world miles on a full charge. Even those low-end models were not exactly cheap, though: a Mini Electric hatch would have cost you £31,000.

Then came the 4, offering 218 miles to a charge for just £25,995. Not only was it fantastically well priced, it was also a huge step up the road for the brand itself, transforming MG into a genuine market competitor for the first time since the late 1990s.

The 4 was nothing short of a wake-up call for the best and brightest of Europe's key players, catching them in their complacency after decades of domination with combustion engines.

MG has been rewarded with massive success – almost 45,000 sales to date. That success has utterly transformed the brand's image, too, to the extent that the £55,000 Cyberster roadster is far from the ridiculous a proposition that it might once have seemed.

History will remember the 4 as the first electric people's car, and although it's getting on a bit now, its influence continues to send ripples throughout the trade. **CM**

2023 Dacia Duster

Dacia's modern reincarnation isn't influential in the manner of a technological breakthrough. No, it has been a lot more subtle than that. When the Romanian concern first arrived on the scene with Renault backing (2005 across Western Europe, 2013 for the UK), most manufacturers were unsuspecting of the success that it would achieve. Many had given up trying to sell really cheap cars in Europe, so how would a €5000 car work? Perhaps the difference with Dacia was that these were fundamentally very well-engineered cars but with all of the frills and fripperies stripped out of them. It turned out there were huge numbers of customers who remained perfectly satisfied without soft-touch plastics and bewilderingly well-featured infotainment systems, as long as the tool at hand, the car itself, worked well.

But the major leap forward has come with the latest, third-generation Duster: it has polished that value USP near to perfection, being barely more expensive than its predecessor in these inflation-ridden times, while bringing far better road-holding and comfort. It's no wonder the Duster continues to be the second-most-popular car in Europe for private buyers – only behind its Sandero stablemate. **AW**

2024 Hyundai Ioniq 5 N

Engineers talk. Mostly they talk about the cars they themselves helped to develop, but it's when they get onto the subject of somebody else's car that you really want to pay attention. How does this relate to the Ioniq 5 N? Because we have rarely known positivity like it. Off the record, engineers from rival companies laud this Hyundai's sense of fun and the ambition of its simulated gearchanges that are chalked up as a very cool idea. They consider the 641bhp N to be a breath of fresh air for the performance EV and they respect its ability to deliver thrills and practicality for a sensible price. Many of them hope to one day work on a similar project.

The Ioniq 5 N has for sure benefited from the fact that it comes laden with little in the way of baggage. Unlike the Porsche Taycan, it doesn't have the weight of six decades of brilliant driver's cars sitting on its back. That meant Hyundai was free to create an electric car designed purely to put a smile on your face, whatever the method. You can argue that its transitions from grip to slip at the back axle can at times feel a bit binary and that those gearchanges are of course entirely make-believe, but the fact remains: the Ioniq 5 N is the first electric car in which you would head off for a B-road blat simply for the hell of it rather than it being an incidental part of getting to your destination. For this reason alone it goes down as a game-changer and, even in this compendium of esteemed metal, among the most significant cars of all. **RL**

2025 Renault 5

Without getting too corporate about it, perhaps the greatest testament to the appeal of the reborn Renault 5 is that a whopping 84% of its UK buyers so far have, until now, never owned a Renault before.

That's an absolutely unheard of rate of conquest, and it lends weight to the emerging notion that electric vehicles are at their most enticing when the very fact that they're electric is incidental rather than being the driving factor behind a buying decision.

This is a supermini that snaps more necks on the high street than a McLaren, has an interior that's as tech-laden and sumptuous as that of any executive saloon and drives with a pep and charisma that's more than reminiscent of some of France's best hot hatches.

The 5 follows the Mini and the Fiat 500 down a well-trodden path by exploiting an often disillusioned car-buying public's sense of nostalgia – in this case in a bid to sweeten the electrification pill. But this is no cynical marketing exercise and, like those two cars that went before, it's completely transforming the fortunes of its maker while establishing new benchmarks for affordable personal mobility.

Oh, and it doesn't have an internal combustion engine. Not that it really matters. **FP**

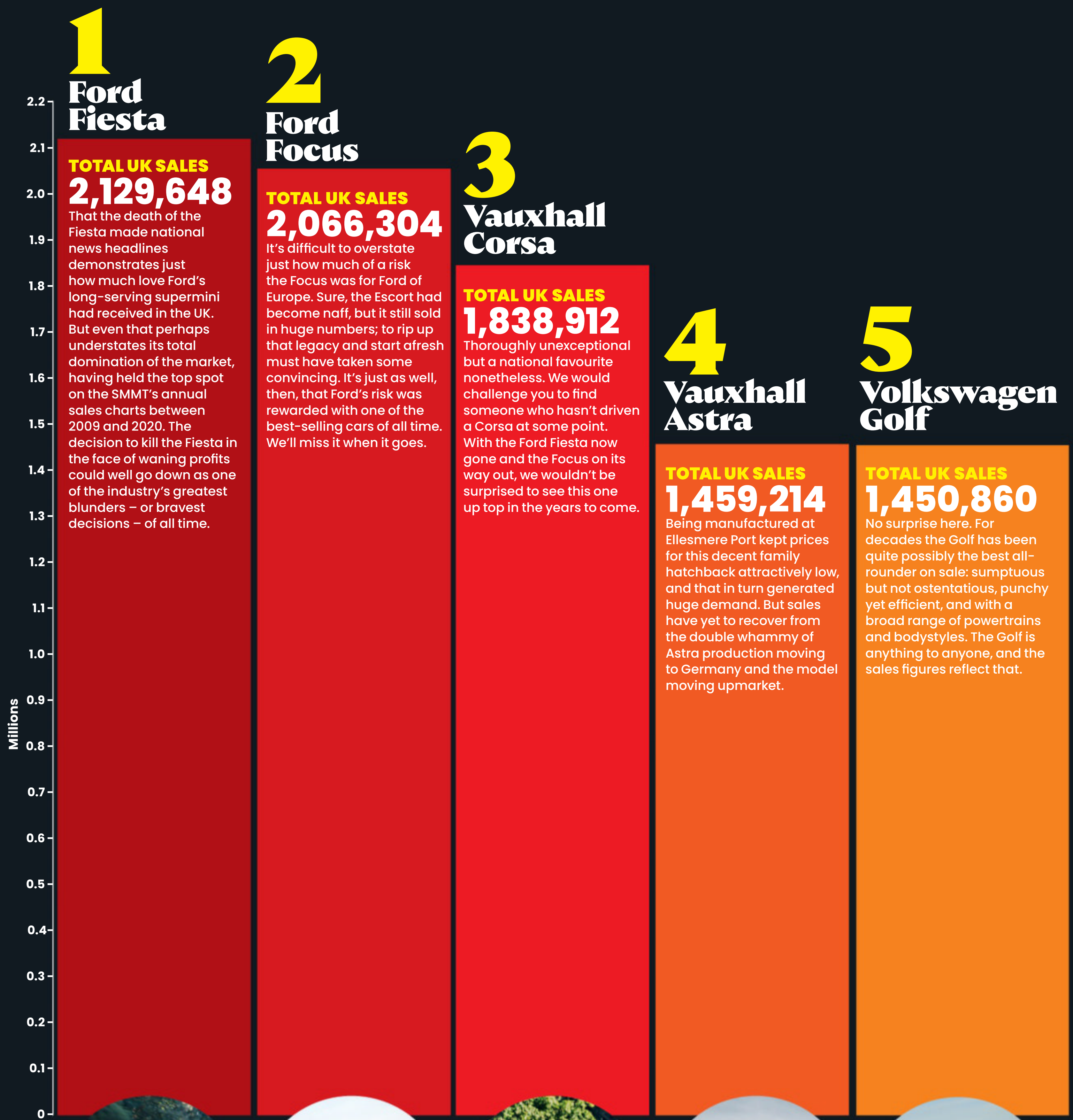
WHAT MIGHT CHANGE IN THE FUTURE?

Our picks for the final five years of this exercise required a bit of projection: significance is often revealed over time, so it's hard to know how well some of our selections might age.

For 2023, for example, we plumped for the Mk3 Dacia Duster over the Ferrari Purosangue and Ineos Grenadier. Those two very different SUVs have been successful but don't feel like game-changers. But if the Purosangue boosts Ferrari's fortunes or Ineos realises its potential, that could change.

This year's pick, the Renault 5, was also an easy choice for now based on sheer instant impact. But it will take time to be certain its influence holds once the initial appeal has waned. We did consider the Fiat Grande Panda, but since that is later in the launch cycle, we've yet to judge if it will transform the firm's fortunes in the way it might.

If we revisit this feature in 2050, which forthcoming cars could represent 2026? Well, it's pure prediction, but if the Volkswagen ID Polo is the affordable EV its maker claims, it could be a game-changer; then again, the BMW iX3 is also supposed to rewrite the EV rulebook. And what about the first of the radically new luxury Jaguar EVs? If that works, it could transform the fortunes of the proud British brand.



1

Ford Fiesta

TOTAL UK SALES

2,129,648

That the death of the Fiesta made national news headlines demonstrates just how much love Ford's long-serving supermini had received in the UK. But even that perhaps understates its total domination of the market, having held the top spot on the SMMT's annual sales charts between 2009 and 2020. The decision to kill the Fiesta in the face of waning profits could well go down as one of the industry's greatest blunders – or bravest decisions – of all time.

2

Ford Focus

TOTAL UK SALES

2,066,304

It's difficult to overstate just how much of a risk the Focus was for Ford of Europe. Sure, the Escort had become naff, but it still sold in huge numbers; to rip up that legacy and start afresh must have taken some convincing. It's just as well, then, that Ford's risk was rewarded with one of the best-selling cars of all time. We'll miss it when it goes.

3

Vauxhall Corsa

TOTAL UK SALES

1,838,912

Thoroughly unexceptional but a national favourite nonetheless. We would challenge you to find someone who hasn't driven a Corsa at some point. With the Ford Fiesta now gone and the Focus on its way out, we wouldn't be surprised to see this one up top in the years to come.

4

Vauxhall Astra

TOTAL UK SALES

1,459,214

Being manufactured at Ellesmere Port kept prices for this decent family hatchback attractively low, and that in turn generated huge demand. But sales have yet to recover from the double whammy of Astra production moving to Germany and the model moving upmarket.

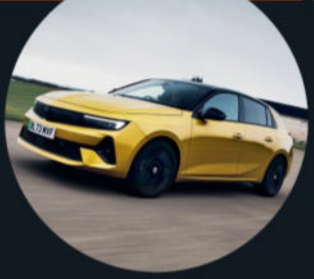
5

Volkswagen Golf

TOTAL UK SALES

1,450,860

No surprise here. For decades the Golf has been quite possibly the best all-rounder on sale: sumptuous but not ostentatious, punchy yet efficient, and with a broad range of powertrains and bodystyles. The Golf is anything to anyone, and the sales figures reflect that.



25 FOR 25

The best-sellers so far

These, according to the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, are the UK's best-selling new cars of the past 25 years. Surprising? Perhaps not, given that Ford's Focus and Fiesta – both well-established names by the turn of the century – occupy the top spots. But how about the Nissan Qashqai, an entirely new kind of car, working its way into sixth place? And it's the only SUV here, which is another surprise. So, too, is the Peugeot 206, which sold for only a single generation but sneaked into 10th place. We certainly didn't see that one coming...

WRITTEN BY CHARLIE MARTIN

6

Nissan Qashqai

TOTAL UK SALES

707,376

Astonishingly, this is the only car in the top 10 that didn't already exist in some form at the turn of the millennium. A remarkable gamble on Nissan's British engineers yielded a huge result – it was even the UK's overall best-seller in 2022.

7

Renault Mégane

TOTAL UK SALES

570,638

Perhaps the Mégane's biggest misstep was to lose its edge. The second and third generations sold in huge numbers thanks to their wacky designs, but the Mk4 did nothing all that special, and buyer interest declined.

8

Renault Clio

TOTAL UK SALES

551,421

Never quite the best in class, but always an attractive, decent-to-drive option. That, and surviving the entire 25-year period, allows the Clio to climb as high as it has. Expect it to remain up here in the years to come.

9

Volkswagen Polo

TOTAL UK SALES

550,408

A tidy design, a refined drive and an affordable price gave the Polo staying power, and it quietly built a fine reputation and accumulated strong sales.

10

Peugeot 206

TOTAL UK SALES

529,050

The 206 started rolling off the line at Ryton in summer 1999 to immediate success; in 2002, it passed the 100,000-unit milestone – the kind of sales figure that could sustain an entire brand nowadays.

BL08 OOV
GTI
ALPINE
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The cars so far: the debate

Deciding on our quarter-century cars sparked plenty of debate. Six of us headed to Caffeine & Machine to talk through our picks

PHOTOGRAPHY MAX EDLESTON

JAMES ATTWOOD Illya, shall we start with your Mini, given that it's from 2001?

ILLYA VERPRAET It's significant on a number of levels. Originally it was meant to be just a car, but BMW built a whole brand off it – and it has been incredibly successful. The Mini was part of a wave of retro designs, along with the Volkswagen Beetle and the Chrysler PT Cruiser, but it's one of the only ones that has really stuck. Those achievements were contingent on how good a product it was. It wasn't hacked off another platform but was built on a completely bespoke platform, and the designers had freedom to style it and give it characteristics that linked it to the original Mini.

STEVE CROPLEY In 25 years, nothing else has come along that could be confused with the Mini. And that 2001 car is better looking than the current one.

IV That's because it's its own thing. The current Minis have to share their platform with a BMW, while this one was a clean slate.

MARK TISSHAW That car created a brand, but it has remained a problem ever since: even today, the three-door hatchback is the centre of the brand. In 25 years of trying and 10 or 15 other models, nothing else has even got close to being so interesting or so popular.

IV But it's the model that keeps Mini grounded. It makes models such as the Countryman and Aceman legitimate. It's like how Porsche can do whatever it likes with 911-adjacent styling because it still has a proper 911.

JA Cars like the Renault 5 and Fiat's 500 and Grande Panda wouldn't exist if Mini hadn't proven that retro design works.

IV Mini is also one of very few manufacturers that have made a premium small car work. The Mini isn't cheap and doesn't feel cheap, and it's a great thing to drive.

MT When they put the third-generation model on a BMW platform, it showed Mini could handle a big price tag: people still bought it.

IV Mini was also an EV pioneer: there was a Mini E trial in Oxford and learnings from that influenced the BMW i3. On which note, we

"Mini was an EV pioneer: a Mini E trial in Oxford influenced the BMW i3"

There were doubters, but BMW's reinvention of Mini has been a great success

Model 3 was a huge hit and had other car makers scrabbling to catch up

Will big, brash premium SUVs come to symbolise the early 21st century?

probably should have had an electric car here, most likely a Tesla Model 3.

RACHEL BURGESS Tesla is about more than just being an EV, though. Every brand in the past 25 years has been influenced by Tesla and tried to follow what it has done as a technology firm.

IV The Model 3 was such a big step up in electric technology: here's an EV that is actually good, has range and drives well.

RB Every CEO from every mainstream manufacturer said: "We're watching what Tesla is doing." Do you remember [former Volkswagen Group CEO] Herbert Diess on social media saying 'oh, me and Elon are hanging out'?

MT Steve, you interviewed Musk when we gave him an award in 2014. How did you find him?

SC I met him in Westfield shopping centre.

RB He wouldn't go there now.

SC Neither would I… Anyway, he was explaining that if people were out buying socks, they'd be in a buying mood and would be interested in cars for sale. That's why they developed Tesla stores.

JA Everyone thinks about Tesla as being an industry outsider, but the first Roadster was basically engineered by Lotus.

MATT PRIOR I tried to bring one today. We had one in for a road test in 2009. It was the only EV at the time that we could drive from the office in Teddington to MIRA in Warwickshire and do something useful when we got there.

SC It was the first car that really conveyed electric performance. I remember going for the throttle, and the car sort of erupted before my foot even got to the end of the accelerator track.

JA So, Matt, since you couldn't turn up in a Roadster, what small, sleek car did you pick?

MP An Audi Q7. Imagine that in 200 years you're setting up an exhibit at the Victoria and Albert Museum trying to define what early 21st-century life was like. If you want a car that exemplifies that, it would be a big, premium SUV. At the start of the century, Audi was selling 500,000 cars; they're now doing two million. Mercedes-Benz and BMW are similar. Between 2010 and 2019, the number of SUVs on the road multiplied by six. The Q7 was Audi's first SUV, and now Audi, Mercedes-Benz, BMW, Volvo and others are all in effect SUV brands.

My example, I grant you, is an uncommon V12 diesel, but the Volkswagen Group diesel story ▸

Q7 helped turn Audi into an SUV brand; diesel cheat devices helped tarnish it

Wilfully futuristic BMW i8 still looks space-age today

Burgess argues the case for the i8 as a pioneer rather than a dead end

◂ is one of the defining events of the past 25 years. Dieselgate prompted the VW Group to reinvent itself and led to the VW ID 3, which was probably released before it was ready. Legislators also decided manufacturers couldn't be trusted, so they lost any influence in decisions such as when to introduce an EV mandate.

Also, German car firms are brilliant at making cars, but they're not technology experts. The emergence of China as a market was very appealing for European firms, but to make cars there they had to do joint ventures with Chinese firms. They thought the European players would do the manufacturing and the local firms would do the red tape, but the Chinese firms took all of the manufacturing knowledge, and now, because they are technology experts, have introduced models that are better engineered than cars like that Q7. The story of the next 25 years will be about many of those Chinese cars.

MT Someone from a national dealer chain told me his technicians say the best-built cars, bar none, are BYDs. Which is quite terrifying for Western car firms.

RB We said earlier about there not being an EV here, but I've brought a car with an electrified plug-in hybrid engine: a BMW i8. It was incredibly innovative and felt like a real turning point for electrification. It arrived in 2014 and still looks brilliant today: it's space-age. You could also put this in the V&A and in 200 years it would still look amazing. It also has a 1.5-litre Mini engine, which I loved talking about to anyone who was interested, because it always surprised them. It did about 30 miles on battery power, which is about the same as my long-term Evoque PHEV now. The technology has moved on in 11 years, but not by that much. It did 0-62mph in 4.4sec, which is all you ever need. BMW pitched it as a hybrid supercar, which was debatable, but it was genuinely a rival to the 911.

JA It didn't make our final list because it felt like BMW never really followed it up properly or built off it, so it was something of a dead end.

RB It sold more than BMW expected. Because of the low tax, it built a huge fleet following: company car drivers who wanted a 911 got an i8. And although you could say it was a dead end, it pushed technology in many ways, such as the use of CFRP to keep it light. A lot of innovation on that car helped BMW and the whole industry.

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"The BMW i8 was incredibly innovative. It felt like a turning point for electrification"

Barely more than a high-rise hatch today, but the Qashqai broke new ground

Game-changers that weren't

AUDI A2
Sneaks into this century, or at least this millennium, because deliveries started in 2000. Ask your preferred AI chatbot to define 'ahead of its time' in the automotive world and the Audi A2 is what it would spit out. **MT**

TESLA ROADSTER
One of the first EVs remains one of the most fun to drive EVs yet made. If more EVs had started out expensive and fun, people might have taken to them more quickly and there might have been no need for today's EV grants. **MP**

JAGUAR I-PACE
It beat the Germans to a credible EV using driving dynamics and innovative design that was recognisably Jaguar. But as Jag so often does, it didn't stick with the I-Pace and support the product long enough to shake off the brand's old-man image. **IV**

VAUXHALL AMPERA
This range-extender saloon felt truly innovative, spearheading new electrified tech and putting Vauxhall at the forefront. There was plenty of hype – it won Car of the Year in 2012 – but it never really took off, and it didn't much help Vauxhall's broader woes. **RB**

HONDA E
Amazing design, brilliant dimensions, sleek tech and fun handling: Honda's tiny E electric city car wowed on first impressions. Unfortunately, it cost as much to buy as bigger EVs that offered more range, dooming it to glorious failure. **JA**

RENAULT ZOE
Renault's credible Clio-based supermini EV had the recipe for success – compactness, agility, space, cheeky looks, decent range – but buyers weren't ready. Renault muddied the waters with a battery-leasing scheme that encouraged distrust. **SC**

JA It's frustrating that if BMW turned around and launched the i8 and i3 today, with updated powertrains, you'd absolutely believe they were conceived this year. They would be amazing.
SC Former BMW sales boss Ian Robertson was the main advocate for those cars, and when he left soon after their launch, it suggested they weren't going to be smash hits. They weren't profitable, were they?
RB Early cars that innovate quite often aren't.
MP The world probably wasn't ready for it in 2014. And it's really expensive to engineer lightweight cars at scale, which was a problem for the i3 and i8, the Audi A2 and other cars that haven't made any money.
IV The i8 was designed to be obviously forward-looking. It's another difference with Tesla: the Model S is massively innovative, but it looked like a normal car. That's what people wanted.
JA Talking about cars that confused on first impression, I've brought a Nissan Qashqai. Of the cars here, the Qashqai, good or bad, has had the most impact in terms of the cars we see on the ▸

Want a scapegoat for today's obsession with crossovers? Blame Nissan

Key players: significant brands of the past 25 years

TOYOTA

Toyota is significant simply as an industrial juggernaut, but its more interesting achievement is the yin of its very frugal and reliable sensible cars to the yang of its models that get the enthusiast excited. **IV**

AUDI

No car maker this century has displayed such styling and brand consistency as Audi, and the marque's volumes have trebled as a result. It's now ready for a change, mind. **MT**

TESLA

Few would contest that Tesla has been, by far, the biggest disruptor in automotive over the past 25 years. Its approach and success have been admired by every mainstream car maker out there, whether they've said so or not. **RB**

BYD

BYD Auto, an offshoot of a battery manufacturer, produced its first car in 2005. Since then it has grown rapidly, from making copycat knock-offs to leading global sales charts for electrified vehicles. You won't be able to miss them over the next 25 years. **JA**

HYUNDAI AND KIA

Around the turn of the century, on a Kia Rio launch, the Korean company said it wanted to be a top-five global car maker. How our eyebrows were raised (one magazine headline: 'Her name is Rio, and she's crap'). No eyebrows are raised now; both of these sibling companies make world-class cars. **MP**

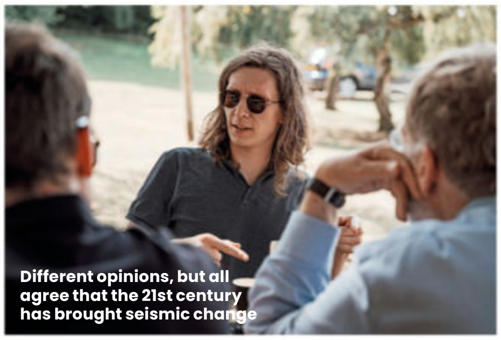
NISSAN

Steered largely by the later disgraced Carlos Ghosn, Nissan stepped boldly into big-scale EV production with the Leaf. Its mammoth Sunderland plant has done most to equip the UK with EV knowhow and an EV-savvy workforce. **SC**

Golf GTI Mk7: jack of all trades, master of most of them

> *“The A110 feels defining because it’s so different from what everyone else was doing”*

Alpine has diversified its line-up off the back of the success of the A110



Different opinions, but all agree that the 21st century has brought seismic change

◂ roads today: everything is a crossover or an SUV. The original plan was to develop a car bigger than the Almera, but Nissan decided that wouldn’t be profitable. So it looked at the popularity of big 4x4s and realised people liked the high-riding position but didn’t want all-wheel drive and agricultural interiors; they just wanted a normal car with a high driving position.

SC It’s interesting to remember how crap the Almera was and the step Nissan made from that, a car nobody wanted, to the Qashqai.

MP When I first drove the Qashqai, I just felt ‘it’s not as big as a Primera inside but it’s taller, has worse fuel economy and costs about 20% more’. And 20 years later, I was still right.

IV The Qashqai and i8 are a nice contrast of how enthusiasts are so often not representative of the wider population. In both cases, a manufacturer took a punt on something different from the norm. The i8 is very cool, but the Qashqai worked because people actually wanted it. It found a completely new segment: it just struck gold.

MT We think of the Qashqai as being radical, but that Mk1 is really just a tall hatchback.

JA It looks like a tall hatchback now because everything is an SUV. The Qashqai is also a British success story: it was designed and engineered here and built in Sunderland.

SC Andy Palmer was involved in its development, wasn’t he?

MT David Moss was probably the true creator.

IV David Twohig worked on the Qashqai – and on the Alpine A110.

MT It’s like football: the same great managers pop up at different clubs, and those clubs tend to win. If you’re good, you can work on a Qashqai and you can work on an A110.

SC I brought my own A110 today. It fits an interesting gap between a Mazda MX-5 and a Porsche 911. And it’s still a Renault, so when you get it serviced, it’s £400 instead of £1400. Because of the mid-engine layout, it has nice balance and steering. I’ve owned nine Lotuses and they were all light and delicate in their handling – and this is the best ‘Lotus’ of them all.

RB If feels defining because it’s so different from what everyone else was doing. It’s almost anachronistic: here was this pure driver’s car in a world of SUVs and fancy technology.

SC It could have failed, couldn’t it? It’s quite similar to the Alfa Romeo 4C in outlook.

MT Has it actually worked? We love it, but you ▸

“You could slip this GTI into any group test today and it would have a chance of winning”

◂ don't see many of them. It's like Mini again: will they ever better their first car, and can they make a brand out of it? You look at what's coming from Alpine and all I see is slightly faster, slightly heavier Renaults.

MP It's like the Polestar 1: it's different from the other cars the brand is going to launch. The first car is one for engineers to do their thing on. Nobody's expecting it to make any money, so they just get away with it.

JA When the A110 was launched, I'm not sure they had plans for it as a brand, but because it was successful, they wanted to do something – but they didn't know what.

SC I didn't buy that car viewing it as part of a family; I just liked it. I've done a couple of track days in it, and even on basic suspension you can, if you're good enough, do a bloke in a Porsche Cayman, which is fun. I intend to hold on to it, because it's light and it has a simple, effective engine that sounds good.

JA Most of us turned up in a car that was pioneering. Mark, you rocked up in a Volkswagen Golf...

MT The Mk7 Golf represents as close to perfection as you can get in a mainstream car. It's the result of some serious engineering power: it's based on the MQB platform, on which 40 million cars have been built, and 40 million more will use it into the 2030s. It represents the engineering might of the VW Group at its biggest. I've brought a facelifted GTI, which is the Golf at its sweetest. I ran one as a long-termer in 2018, and I was so close to buying it afterwards – although it was a three-door, so it wouldn't have worked with my dog. The Mk8 Golf was a backward step in almost every department.

SC When they were doing the Mk8 Golf they were also working on the ID 3 and all that. Do you think they got diverted?

MT It's back to Matt's point about Dieselgate changing Volkswagen. It meant the ID cars were rushed through before they were ready. With the enormous costs of developing the MEB platform, some of the tech had to go back into the ICE cars, and some of the usability flaws of the ID 3 made their way over to the Golf.

SC There's also a huge shortage of personnel if you're trying to build two cars instead of one.

MT In the coming years, firms such as VW and Mercedes will offer identically styled ICE cars and EVs on completely different platforms. So there will be an ID Golf on an EV platform and a Golf based on a combustion-engine architecture.

THIS PLACE IS FOR EVERYONE

458 was so good that subsequent Ferraris have struggled to surpass it

MP Is it the best car... in the world?

MT If I could have one car to drive forever more, it would be a Mk7.5 Golf GTI. You could slip that car into almost any group test today and it would have a chance of winning.

RB If I were going to pick just one car to buy, it would be a three-door Mk7 Golf GTI. I've always found those sorts of cars are my sweet spot. I don't want to be driving a supercar; I want a car I can really live with and not be scared of chucking around corners. To me, that's the perfect car.

SC Where's the Ford Focus in this?

MT I think it lacks longevity. It has better handling, but it's the quality. If you got in a six-year-old Focus now, it would feel dated.

RB We should talk about other cars that should have been in the mix for today. Are we missing something high-end?

MP The Ferrari 458. I did think about trying to find one, because it is one of the greatest sports cars/supercars of the past 25 years. Enough owners are not buying 296s because they would still rather have a 458.

MT McLaren really deserves a mention: the 570S was peak McLaren. The firm is about to change a lot, so we don't know what will happen after that, but McLaren at its peak made the best Ferraris even better.

IV If we're talking hypercars, the 'holy trinity' – the McLaren P1, LaFerrari and Porsche 918 – should be mentioned. They started the hybrid thing, parallel to the i8; they pushed the boundaries of speed and technology. It was the first time hybrid technology was applied in that way, and now everything is electric in some way.

JA If you had to drive home in one of the six cars here, and you couldn't take the one you brought, what would be your pick?

SC The Mk1 Mini, because I'm completely persuaded by the concept, even after 25 years. And I was the idiot who said 'it will never work, because it's not 10 feet long and it wasn't designed by Alec Issigonis'.

IV I'll take Steve's A110. It's just a compact, sensibly sized sports car without much bullshit around it. I could keep driving it forever.

MT It would be the Mini for me too. It has aged unbelievably well.

MP A coupé version of the i8, because I can see myself one day buying one.

RB It's the Golf GTI.

JA I love that GTI, but I'll take the i8 – since I've volunteered to drive it back to the dealer... ◼

Golf GTI and i8 sit proud, but not all 21st-century benchmarks are sports cars

Readers' picks

The BMW i3 REx: it's the range-extender aspect that is one of the most important features. In the future, this will probably be seen as the direction in which electric cars should have progressed, rather than having ever-bigger batteries that weigh too much.
GRAHAM WILSON

The BMW i3 – even though it obviously didn't have anywhere near the market impact of the BMW 3 Series.
RICHARD PIPER

The first Tesla Model S was definitely super-significant; it shook the industry.
TOM ALAERTS

The Fiat Panda: it's a well-priced car that gets good economy.
AARON ORCHARD

Nissan Qashqai. I wouldn't call it a good car, but it certainly caused the biggest shake-up in model line-ups and buyers' choices so far this century.
ALEX BOURNE

The Bugatti Veyron. Its performance was and is a benchmark. No supercar manufacturer before had the guts to put a 16-cylinder engine in a production car.
'MR STIX'

The Tesla Model S: it kick-started the battery-electric car and sent shockwaves through the motor industry. Manufacturers that ignored it are still feeling the pain today.
TONY SHERGOLD

The new Mini: a fantastic little 2000s car to drive.
DOMINIC TURNER

The Nissan Qashqai: it started the decline into all things crossover.
PAUL HAMILTON

WITH THANKS TO...

Phil McGovern at Caffeine & Machine.
Paul Neale at Cotswold Cheltenham BMW.
Richard Usher (Great British Car Journey) and Paul Coulter (owner) for providing the Mini.

25 FOR 25

AUTOCAR
3 JANUARY 2001
Hottest ever MGF
Mean new look and more power for MG's Lotus basher
Official pictures
100
MG
Exclusive
Mini's secrets
Road Test
Renault Clio V6
This week
Astra cabrio Official pics
First drive Cobra Lotus
Bentley Bold new future
F1 test Is this Jag's year?

3 JANUARY 2001

The first Autocar magazine of the new century was a cracker: official details of MG's hot new roadster, the F Trophy 160 SE, conceived to do battle with the BMW Z3 via its 158bhp engine and £21,000 price tag (ouch, that's supermini money these days). That, plus a massive fact file on the new BMW Mini, a review of the transformative new Bentley Continental T and a full road test of the loopy new Renault Clio V6. The verdict on this mid-engined mad hatter? Aside from a couple of minor quibbles, it was "simply a cracking good car, one that's almost as good to drive as it is to look at".

19 AUGUST 2003

"Ford Capri is back!" shouted this 2003 cover of Autocar, seemingly about 21 years too soon.

However, this wasn't an improbably premature first look at 2024's rakish-roofed electric crossover but rather the (slightly less) early unveiling of the radical, Focus-based Ford Visos concept car that was to be unwrapped at the Frankfurt motor show a month later.

It was exclusive, too: Ford sent a shadowy teaser photo to the news desk to build excitement, but when the magazine's designers started fiddling around in Photoshop, they found a second file that showed this striking shooting brake in all its glory – which we obviously had to share with our readers.

As it turned out, the Visos would never make it to showrooms, but the very words 'Capri is back' would once again adorn the cover two decades later – and this time it was about a production car.

See? We were right. Eventually...

JAG FIRST OFFICIAL PICTURES OF X-TYPE ESTATE
AUTOCAR
Every Week
19 August 2003 £2.10
FORD CAPRI IS BACK!
TOP SECRET PICTURES
Nice to see you again old friend...
PLUS
BMW 5-SERIES SHOCK
First UK comparison Why Jaguar now makes a better car than BMW
Head to head
Alonso v Raikkonen: the next 10 years
What's fastest?
911 Turbo v Hyundai WRC v Suzuki GSX-R1000
"I will make Alfa better than BMW"
By the new boss of Alfa Romeo
DV03 MCL

25 YEARS OF NEWS STORIES

Autocar's front covers have captured the biggest stories in motoring history. **FELIX PAGE** picks out some of our most memorable front pages over the past quarter century, featuring landmark group tests, huge news scoops and world-first reviews

AUTOCAR
THE ORIGINAL CAR WEEKLY
DRIVEN
Nissan GT-R Spec V
Lighter, quicker, naughtier
Bad news for Bugatti...
New McLaren F1
SCOOP Ultimate hypercar coming back – if the world's ready for it
It'll blow your mind, just like the last one
AUTOCAR IMAGE
TWIN TEST NEW 370Z VS CAYMAN
ROAD TEST
New Kia Soul
Korea discovers design
ALSO INSIDE
New Merc E63 AMG
Scoop: next Focus
Used Audi special
'RS4 for hot hatch cash'
Another easy win for the Porsche?
Don't count on it...

1 APRIL 2009

As automotive news scoops go, surely none could be more exciting than getting a phone call from someone close to McLaren who tells you the firm has "just started looking at doing another F1, it is a clean-sheet design".

That was in 2009, when the Woking firm was still two years away from launching the 12C as its first production car in two decades, so talk of a flagship hypercar to succeed the indomitable F1 might have seemed premature. But more fool any eye-rollers (who had maybe clocked the date we ran the story), because just three years later our prophecy was proven true when McLaren stopped the clocks with its new P1: a drop-dead, 900bhp hyper-hybrid to rival the LaFerrari.

AUTOCAR
27 December 2006
EXTRA PAGES
953 AAN
New Cars Driven
LAND ROVER'S INCREDIBLE COUPE
The secret TT rival that changes the face of SUVs
INSIDE £2,000,000
IT MUST BE THE CHRISTMAS ROAD TEST
ROAD TEST YEAR
Every new car, every test, what we won't forget
Plus Is the Rolls still the best car in the world?

20 DECEMBER 2006

"Land Rover's secret TT rival" we cried. Can you imagine? A lightweight, high-riding coupé with a low roof and the same badge you'll find on the Defender.

As it happened, Gaydon wasn't quite getting ready to go toe-to-toe with Porsche and Audi in the sporting two-door segment, but we were bang on in reporting that Land Rover was planning a fashionable Freelander replacement as an 'image car' conceived to attract younger buyers to the brand.

It would be another five years before we got our first look at the Evoque but, sure enough, its glitzy Kensington debut was one of the most star-studded and fashion-focused of any new car yet seen, complete with Posh Spice, natch. When the wraps came off, it was clear that this two-door crossover did indeed straddle the gaping chasm between coupé and 4x4.

29 AUGUST 2012

It must have been the London Olympics that brought us out in a fit of feverish patriotism at the end of summer 2012: we united the 21 best cars being made in Britain at the time, went on a massive road trip in some of the most expensive and took a deep dive into the factories in which they were made. And if that wasn't enough, we also drove the latest Jaguar XJ, revealed the new Land Rover Freelander and looked back at the history of one of the most important British cars of all time: the original Mini.

124-PAGE SPECIAL
AUTOCAR
THE ORIGINAL CAR WEEKLY
BEST OF BRITISH
STARRING
21 BRILLIANT BRIT STARS
How our cars are taking on the world and winning
£1,000,000 road trip
5000 miles in Britain's finest cars
Can you name them all? Turn to p38 to find out
New Freelander revealed
Baby Landie gets Evoque makeover (wait 'til you see inside)
Quick, fun, bonkers
Meet our homegrown giant killers
PLUS
Supercharged Jag XJ driven
New Aston DB9 first pictures
Mini tops best-ever UK car poll

15 JULY 2015

It's fun to rewind a few years and find the green shoots of some of the most ground-shaking automotive stories of all time. A decade ago, we ran a world-exclusive report on Aston Martin partnering legendary Red Bull Formula 1 designer Adrian Newey to design a road-going hypercar, and we revealed that Aston was considering a long-awaited return to the F1 grid.

Both scenarios played out as the crystal ball foretold: the Valkyrie hypercar entered production in 2021, at around the same time as Aston entered an F1 race for the first time in 61 years. We even scored bonus points for scooping Red Bull's own "inevitable" production car, which would break cover three years later as the RB17.

AUTOCAR
FIRST FOR CAR NEWS AND REVIEWS
NEW JAGUAR XE
Boston to Bermuda in diesel saloon
WATCH OUT, McLAREN
EXCLUSIVE NEW RED BULL ASTON
Why F1's Adrian Newey is designing Aston's next hypercar
AUTOCAR IMAGE
The supercar morgue
Meet the men who chop up Ferraris
New Vauxhall Viva
Road test verdict on £8k city car
Flat out in new Audi R8
Looks like the old one, but is it better?

4 MARCH 2020

With just days until the Geneva motor show was due to get under way in 2020, organisers made the controversially belated decision to close the doors to keep Covid out. As a result, all 28 show stars were revealed virtually. It would have been an absolute banger of a show, too: new Golf GTI, the electric Fiat 500, the most expensive Bentley yet, BMW's i4 concept, a shape-shifting Renault (yes, really) and many more. And all of the biggest names in the business would have been there, too.

Alas, we were confined to Autocar towers the following week, grappling with a new-fangled platform called Zoom to tune in virtually to all of the important debuts. We still managed to put together an absolute whopper of a cover featuring the most dazzling cars – which is especially fortunate because it would come to serve as a swansong for the century-old Geneva show: its lacklustre revival in 2024 was later confirmed to be the final running of the event.

NEW AUDI A3
AUTOCAR
FIRST FOR NEWS AND REVIEWS EVERY WEEK
28 NEW CARS REVEALED
OFFICIAL PICS
GOLF GTI
Why it's the last of the great hot hatches
NEW FIAT 500 – NOW AN EV
NEW E-CLASS
ALFA GTA IS BACK
SHOCK BENTLEY
SKODA'S CUT-PRICE GTI
HYUNDAI'S TESLA
NEW 911 TURBO
9 CARS, 1 WINNER
BRITAIN'S BEST NEW SMALL CAR
RENAULT'S SHAPE-SHIFTER

Fiat 500 enters electric era

30 AUGUST 2023

Beyond the dramatic, divisive super-GT that lands next year to start the firm's new era as a maker of top-drawer luxury EVs, little has been revealed officially about Jaguar's new-world-order product plan.

Two years ago, long before the momentous unveiling of the controversial Type 00 concept and the 'copy nothing' marketing campaign, we got wind of one of the most exciting comebacks since the Fiat 500. Yes, having cancelled plans for an electric XJ way back in 2021, Jaguar was understood to be once again working on a large, low-riding, long-nosed limo to rival the Mercedes EQS and BMW i7. Whether it will revive the storied nameplate has yet to be seen, but the survival of the brand's iconic 'leaper' emblem suggests it's not ready to completely abandon tradition…

DRIVEN WORLD'S WILDEST OFF-ROADER
AUTOCAR
FIRST FOR NEWS AND REVIEWS EVERY WEEK
HERE IN 2025
SHOCK NEW JAG
EXCLUSIVE Luxury limo to spearhead brand's reinvention
BRITAIN'S BEST FUN EV 2023
The affordable EVs that will put a smile on your face
Starring Renault, Cupra, Abarth, MG and more
SPECIAL REPORT AVOID GETTING RIPPED OFF ON CAR INSURANCE

25 years *of* bargains

SAM PHILLIPS shows you how to get our quarter-century cars on your drive for less, plus a wildcard option if you fancy something different

Aston Martin DB9

A V12 grand tourer for a few quid more than a new Dacia Spring? Okay, buying a leggy Aston Martin DB9 is a bit of a gamble, but low-mileage cars are still good value at around £25,000.

Watch for corrosion on the wheel arches and opt for the reliable auto 'box because the manual's clutch will only last around 20,000 miles.

ONE WE FOUND Aston Martin DB9 5.9 Seq, 2008, 53,000 miles, £27,649

WILDCARD ALTERNATIVE Ferrari 612 Scaglietti 5.7 Maranello's old-school grand tourer is now a modern classic, especially with a gated manual gearbox.

Mini hatch

BMW's reincarnation of the storied Mini hatchback is the ideal choice for any savvy shopper on the hunt for a fun, warmed-up supermini. Fine handling, precise steering and a torquey 1.6-litre engine can cost from as little as £500, although buying a Cooper or Cooper S for anything less than a grand will tie you to high-mileage examples with plenty of battle scars.

Rusty sills are common, and clutches can wear prematurely. Watch out for oil leaks from the valve cover gasket and oil pan gasket. The R53 Cooper S is a real hoot on a rural back road – its Eaton supercharger boosts power to 163bhp, which is a full 48bhp more than the standard Cooper. Even today a good example feels incisive, agile and quick, and it was something of an underdog in the early-noughties hot hatch class.

You can snap up a tidy Cooper S for around £2500, but be wary of high mileages and find one with a strong MOT and service history. Make sure the supercharger has been serviced with new drive belts, and watch out for overheating.

The more hardcore John Cooper Works GPs have rightfully gained modern classic status, and as a result prices for those start from around £12,000. Worth every penny, though.

ONE WE FOUND Mini 1.6 Cooper S, 2004, 46,000 miles, £3490

WILDCARD ALTERNATIVE Renault Clio 182 Can't match the Mini for retro charm, but thanks to its stronger performance and deft handling it will outshine the Cooper on a rural B-road.

Mercedes-Benz SLS AMG

The 458 below is on the brink of collector's item status, but the SLS may well be there already. Rag-tops are cheaper, but it's the coupé you want. They cost from about £150k, but rarer colours and lower miles can drive the price closer to £200k.

The 6.2-litre 563bhp atmo V8 is highly strung but robust. Make sure the DCT 'box has had a software update to iron out the slow shifts that affected early cars and steer clear of cars fitted with expensive carbon-ceramic brakes.

ONE WE FOUND Mercedes-Benz SLS 6.2 63 V8 AMG, 2010, 20,000 miles, £179,950

WILDCARD ALTERNATIVE Jaguar XKR-S
Bullish Jaguar GT is great to drive but a more hardcore alternative to the SLS.

Ferrari 458 Italia

If you want Maranello's hedonistic naturally aspirated V8 supercar in your garage, you better strike now because the 458 is tipped to become a modern classic in years to come. A budget of around £120,000 is enough for an immaculate example with a full service history.

The Getrag dual-clutch automatic 'box should deliver razor-sharp gearchanges, so watch for missing gears or jerky shifts on a test drive. Corrosion on the wheel arches isn't uncommon, and if buying a drop-top 458 Spider, make sure the roof doesn't jam open.

ONE WE FOUND Ferrari 458 Italia F1 DCT, 2012, 24,000 miles, £124,995

WILDCARD ALTERNATIVE Noble M600
Unfettered British-built brute has bags of V8 character and sublime handling balance. Good luck finding one, though.

Ford Fiesta

With a stylish exterior, excellent ergonomics and class-leading dynamics, Ford's vivacious little supermini neatly balances deft handling with a supple ride. As one of Britain's best-selling cars, the classifieds are abundant with examples of varying age, condition and price.

The 1.0-litre Ecoboost (available with 98bhp, 123bhp and 138bhp) is a brilliant little engine that's peppy, efficient and characterful, but it's tarnished by wet belt issues and coolant leaks. Aim for a low-miler with a solid service history.

ONE WE FOUND Ford Fiesta 1.0T Ecoboost Titanium, 2012, 65,000 miles, £3980

WILDCARD ALTERNATIVE Audi A1
More refined than the Fiesta but not as fun to drive spiritedly.

Fiat 500

The Fiat 500 brought the ailing Italian brand back from the brink when it was launched in 2008 – the model won the hearts of more than three million buyers worldwide thanks to its retro charm.

Prices for our pick – the characterful 900cc Twinair – start from around £1200, and the classifieds are packed full of cars with bright colours, liveries and strong kit rosters.

ONE WE FOUND Fiat 500 0.9 Twinair Lounge, 2011, 54,000 miles, £3150

WILDCARD ALTERNATIVE Hyundai i10 1.1
Not the most thrilling city car, but a durable and hard-working choice nonetheless.

Rolls-Royce Phantom

Once a £215,000 stately home on wheels, the Rolls-Royce Phantom VII is now a bargain super-luxury super-saloon that can be found being offered for sale for less than £50,000. Ride and refinement are second to none, and even well-used examples feel as opulent inside as a modern-day Range Rover.

Avoid high-milers and ensure any car you buy has a full service history. Maintenance costs and parts can be astronomically expensive, with some engine repairs costing up to £9000.

ONE WE FOUND Rolls-Royce Phantom 6.7 V12, 2005, 66,000 miles, £69,750

WILDCARD ALTERNATIVE Bentley Arnage 6.8T
The Arnage is four cylinders down on the Roller, but it is no less lavish inside.

Nissan Qashqai

This SUV-cum-hatchback sparked the crossover revolution and became Britain's favourite car. The classifieds are full of tired-looking, sub-£1500 early examples that look rather dated nowadays, so we would opt for a facelifted car from 2010, one of which will cost upwards of £2500.

Older cars suffer from shock absorber failure, and clutches don't last very long, so shop with care. Rain leaks into the cabin are common, and clogged diesel particulate filters can taint the popular 1.5-litre dCi.

ONE WE FOUND Nissan Qashqai 1.5 dCi N-Tec+ 2WD, 2012, 94,000 miles, £2795

WILDCARD ALTERNATIVE Skoda Yeti 2.0 TDI
Robust and quirky. Surprisingly good off road.

Volkswagen Golf

As hatchbacks go, the Golf is the out-and-out leader when it comes to build quality, refinement, space and practicality. Factor in its user-friendly technology and strong ergonomics and it's easy to see why this multi-talented Volkswagen is so popular.

It also caters to a broad range of buyers: the GTI is a superb all-rounder, being both fast and relatively frugal, while the lower-powered petrols make everyday commutes efficient and hassle-free. Diesels are best for those who cover big miles, and many cost only £20 to tax.

ONE WE FOUND Volkswagen Golf GTI 2.0 TSI, 2017, 49,000 miles, £15,999

WILDCARD ALTERNATIVE Seat Leon/Cupra Leon
Third-generation hatch is engaging and good value for money. Buy the Cupra if you want to ramp up the driver appeal.

Tesla Model 3

High-mileage Model 3s can already be found for less than £10,000, but you can pick up a well-maintained dual-motor Long Range, which can travel up to 348 miles on a full charge, for around £17,000.

Software glitches are common, and the build quality on early examples is poor, so check the standard of the paintwork and consistency of the panel gaps. Battery degradation is unavoidable, so charge to 80% where you can in order to boost longevity.

ONE WE FOUND Tesla Model 3 (dual-motor) Long Range, 2021, 36,000 miles, £21,478

WILDCARD ALTERNATIVE Porsche Taycan Performance Plus
Electric saloon is one of the best-handling EVs you can buy.

BMW 3 Series

The 'all-rounder' moniker is bandied around rather nonchalantly, but for the G20 BMW 3 Series it couldn't be more apt. While many will gravitate towards the refined and abstemious 320d oil-burner, the 330e plug-in hybrid is a tempting alternative thanks to its 37-mile electric range.

Keen drivers will be drawn to either of the two six-cylinder options, which also get four-wheel drive. The B58-powered, 369bhp M340i petrol is fast and acceptably frugal and handles beautifully, but the less powerful but more torquey M340d diesel is just as entertaining.

You can buy one for less than £10,000, and overall reliability is good. Diesels can be knocked back by timing chain-, DPF- and EGR-related problems, while infotainment glitches and oil leaks aren't uncommon.

ONE WE FOUND BMW 3 Series M340d Touring xDrive, 2021, 56,000 miles, £33,250

WILDCARD ALTERNATIVE Audi A4 Avant
Excellent ride and even better build quality inside.

Bentley Bentayga

While the 600bhp W12 can now be found on sale for a smidge under £50,000, its 18mpg, £760 yearly road tax and significant annual servicing costs make it hard to justify in (relatively) conventional used car buying terms. The rich and characterful W12 engine suits the opulent Crewe-made SUV, but the silky-smooth 4.0-litre V8 diesel is by far the better buy – and it produces the same amount of torque as the W12 anyway.

If petrol is more your thing, the 543bhp 4.0-litre V8 is widely available and, thanks to its cylinder deactivation technology, is surprisingly efficient. It's not too expensive to tax, either.

The diesel is cheaper to run (35mpg and £190 road tax), but just be wary of cars that have been used mainly for short hops, because EGR valve failures and clogged DPFs are common. Walk away if you feel any vibrations under load: this could spell issues with the dual-mass flywheel or the torque converter in the eight-speed automatic gearbox.

Supple ride comfort is one of the Bentayga's hallmarks, so make sure the air suspension is free of any unusual noises and the adjustable ride height operates consistently – the struts can leak and can cost anywhere between £1200 and £2000 to replace.

ONE WE FOUND Bentley Bentayga 4.0d V8 Auto 4WD, 2017, 46,000 miles, £61,948

WILDCARD ALTERNATIVE Aston Martin DBX 4.0 V8

A spectacular performer with fantastic handling, but a refined and luxurious GT, too.

Jaguar I-Pace

Value for money is high on the agenda when it comes to used I-Paces. Software gremlins and water ingress are its main foibles, and watch for dodgy charging ports refusing to unlock cables.

The I-Pace is one of the more engaging electric SUVs you can buy: it's quick, poised and, thanks to adaptive suspension, comfortable. A 200- to 250-mile real-world range is achievable, and the cabin is pure luxury, with high-quality materials and crisp touchscreens.

ONE WE FOUND Jaguar I-Pace 400 90kWh HSE, 2021, 43,000 miles, £19,995

WILDCARD ALTERNATIVE Audi E-tron Sportback

Refined, spacious and practical E-tron still looks smart today.

Land Rover Defender

Mightily impressive off road, suave and sophisticated on it: the reimagined Defender is one of the most versatile 4x4s you can buy, and you can snap one up for around £35,000. Spend £50k and you'll get a 90 or 110 with a better service history and fewer miles under its wheels.

Later D250 and D350 diesels are more reliable and suit the Defender's character – and find a car with adaptive dampers if you can, because these add an extra layer of ride comfort.

ONE WE FOUND Land Rover Defender 110 3.0 D250 HSE 4WD, 2020, 43,000 miles, £47,000

WILDCARD ALTERNATIVE Mercedes-Benz G350d

Retro-inspired 4x4 G-Class is more luxurious and refined but not much more efficient than the V8.

Kia EV6

The 577bhp dual-motor EV6 GT is the enthusiast's choice, but for everyday use the EV6 has greater appeal in rear-wheel-drive form. "One of the most engaging-handling family EVs of the moment," we said of the EV6 GT-Line RWD, when we road tested it in 2022.

The EV6 also has ultra-fast charging speeds, a spacious interior and a decent real-world range. Prices start from around £16,000.

ONE WE FOUND Kia EV6 77.4kWh GT-Line, 2022, 36,000 miles, £22,290

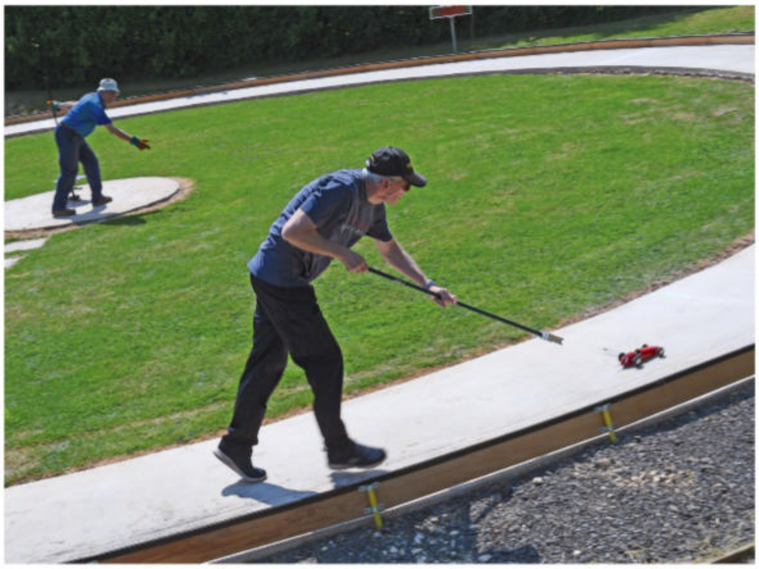
WILDCARD ALTERNATIVE Polestar 2 Single Motor Long Range

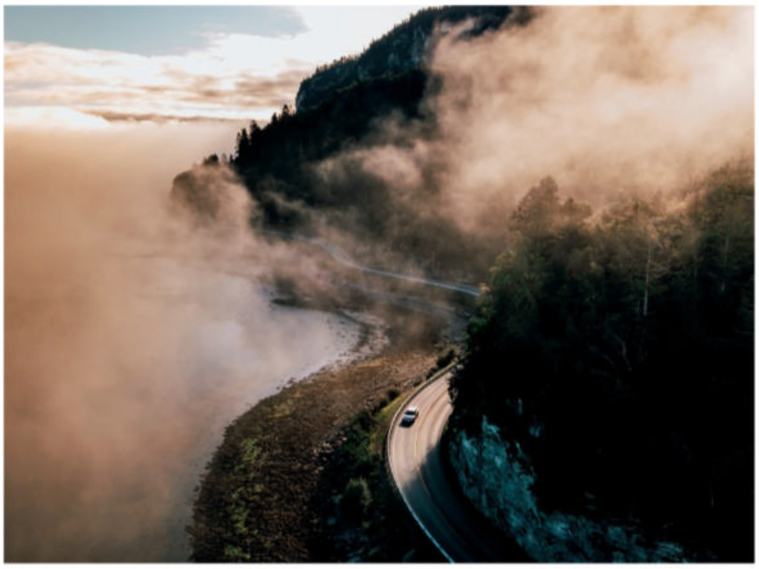
Sterner-riding, but rear-driven chassis and excellent efficiency make the 2 a solid buy.

STEVE CROPLEY
My outstanding memory is travelling to Toyota City in 2018 to award then CEO Akio Toyoda Autocar's highest annual accolade: the Issigonis Trophy. He took the award extremely seriously, giving us an afternoon of his time, showing us around and even arranging to drive into our video set in an original Issigonis Mini like the one he owned when he worked in London decades earlier. His time as CEO was ending, but his prominence, influence and love of cars continues unabated.

25 years of memories

Autocar's writers recall their most memorable motoring moments





JOHN EVANS
Hobbies come in all forms and attract all sorts, but had I not seen this one for myself, I would never have believed it. For the niche activity known as tether racing, grown men and women gather each weekend at small oval circuits to see whose model car can circulate around a pole the fastest – and it is fast, with speeds reaching 200mph. The hobby's heyday was the 1930s, but tether racing is making a modest comeback. Of the many stories I've covered for Autocar, this is the one that makes me question who is pottier: the people actually taking part, or me driving 150 miles to watch them do it.

FELIX PAGE
Of all the stunning photos Max Edleston took during our Norwegian road trip in 2022, this is my favourite. The composition and lighting are amazing, naturally, but I'm most fond of how it transports me back to a very happy time. It was 6am, the mist was rolling in off the Trondheim Fjord and the roads were quiet enough to hear our drone whirring along the coastline some 500 feet above me. As I flicked the new Kia EV6 GT into sport mode and unleashed its 577bhp, I was overcome by a palpable sense of reassurance that everything was going to be just fine for driving fans.

RACHEL BURGESS

Early morning. Sunny. North Wales. Empty road. Long sweeping bends. Volkswagen Golf R. Nowhere to be. Need I say more?

MATT SAUNDERS

Press day at the 2014 Geneva show was, my diary tells me, Tuesday 4 March. It was the first Geneva show at which all three members of the hypercar 'holy trinity' – the McLaren P1, LaFerrari and Porsche 918 Spyder – would be on display in the same hall for the general public to see. There was a real tingle in the ether about it.

I expected the usual 'no comment' when I asked Porsche R&D boss Wolfgang Hatz for his thoughts on the 918's opposition during a round-table interview. But Wolfgang couldn't resist. He smiled and said how much he liked and admired the Ferrari – and he was looking forward to catching up with his old pal Roberto Fedeli over a glass of wine and telling him as much.

The Porsche PR man later tried to retrospectively remove the occurrence from my notebook – not that it was worth fretting over. Hatz was a prime example that, even at the sharpest of its sharp ends, the car industry is still run by human beings who have personal preferences and relationships. Sure, they make the odd gaffe now and then, but this is a much better industry with them in it.

MURRAY SCULLION

It sounds odd, but my favourite memory of a day that involved driving an XJ220 is not in fact of driving an XJ220. I'd gone up to visit Don and Justin Law to drive said car, which was a great experience, obviously. But looking round the frankly ridiculous number of XJ220s at the facility, going out in the XJ220 van and getting to hear Don say "go on lad, spank it!" easily outweighed the joy the big Jag brought. Don even bought lunch.

MARK TISSHAW

Put 100 enthusiasts in a room and ask them to come to a consensus on the top bucket-list car to drive, and my hunch is the McLaren F1 would emerge as number one. Following the launch of the Senna in 2019, McLaren let us try the Senna against not only its immediate predecessor in its Ultimate Series lineage, the P1, but also the F1, giving us one memorable day at Bruntingthorpe. The F1 felt special, of course, but you could never forget its value (£25 million-plus) while driving it. The P1 was actually the car that stirred the senses the most, and I reckon it would still feel box-fresh today. A very special day and some very special cars.

LIVING WITH A...

Where our long-term test cars have been and what they've done

“The ë-C3 handled most bumps well and rarely crashed over potholes”

FINAL REPORT **MILEAGE 3799**

CITROEN E-C3

Did this electric supermini win our hearts and minds? The verdict is in

WHY WE RAN IT Can Citroën's new small electric car challenge the class-leading Renault 5?

Our time with Citroën's smallest car has come to an end after around 2500 miles, and in that time I've learned a lot about this electric supermini.

Given we have had a relatively balmy summer, the conditions couldn't have been better for a small EV such as the ë-C3 to thrive and really make a case for itself among an increasingly large pool of rivals.

Much like parts of the summer we've just enjoyed, the competition couldn't be hotter for the ë-C3 right now. There's the BYD Dolphin Surf, Hyundai Inster and, of course, the Renault 5, which is already considered by many to be the benchmark small EV. There's also competition in-house at Stellantis, with the Fiat Grande Panda and Vauxhall Frontera set to keep the ë-C3 on its toes when they arrive later this year.

After our time together, my feelings about the ë-C3's departure are mixed. Don't get me wrong: there is a lot to like about this budget package. But ultimately it didn't quite suit my lifestyle and there were some glaring flaws.

Let's start with the good bits. There was ample interior space, with head and leg room in both rows a real plus point. The Citroën's boxy silhouette meant passengers didn't struggle for room and, at 310 litres, the boot was a usable size and shape too.

The standard equipment gave me everything I needed, with wireless phone charging, automatic wipers, LED headlights and wireless Apple CarPlay – all features I enjoyed using every day (aside from the wipers, which sat out most of the summer). These features' controls were all easily accessible, as were the climate controls, an easy reach away below the infotainment system. The heated seats, heated steering wheel and heated windscreen didn't get much of a workout, but all three would make frosty mornings much more bearable.

Driving the ë-C3 was largely easy and trouble-free. Its 111bhp electric motor was enough for most situations, but naturally it struggled when asked for intense bursts of power above 60mph. The Citroën was excellent in town, able to weave around parked cars and slot into parking spaces more easily than any other car I've driven.

Ride comfort was also pretty good. The ë-C3 handled most bumps with aplomb and rarely crashed over larger potholes, and it acquitted itself well when tackling the more unsettled roads of rural west Berkshire.

Importantly, its ADAS features

SECOND OPINION

The ë-C3 is very easy to live with in town, but the digital speedo can frustrate. The display only refreshes every second or so, so it's too easy to stray over the limit as you accelerate and hit, say, 23mph in a 20mph zone before the screen catches up. It's a problem given London's abundance of cameras. **CM**

Chunky good looks and neat details

It's nippy up to 60mph, and the ride is pretty well composed on most roads

Physical control buttons for various functions make life easier

A compact footprint makes for easy parking and manoeuvrability

The cabin is roomy, but a good old-fashioned round steering wheel would be nice

were among the least intrusive and stress-inducing I've used for some time. The lane keeping assistance and speed limit warnings are, as usual, on by default when you start the car, but I rarely noticed them, despite being notified when they kicked in via a small light on the ë-C3's digital screen.

Unfortunately, a few things held the ë-C3 back. The most significant of those was efficiency, which varied massively between competitive and woeful, depending on the type of driving.

Over three months, the best I saw was a fairly creditable 4.5mpkWh, achieved along a route that was almost entirely at town speeds below 30mph. That equates to a range of 197 miles from our car's 43.7kWh battery – in line with Citroën's advertised claims.

Yet when driving home to see family – a journey of around 70 miles along a mix of motorways and A-roads – I'd regularly see no more than 2.9mpkWh. That's equal to just 127 miles of range, even in optimal conditions of 25-29deg C.

You expect faster depletion of the battery on quicker roads, but dealing with such a shortfall in efficiency is made all the harder because the ë-C3 still lacks a trip computer to display its economy figure. All it shows is a rapidly dwindling range indicator, making longer trips harder to manage than they need to be. This was offset slightly by a decent claimed charging speed of 100kW, although I never saw more than 86kW.

Another feature notable by its absence was any form of brake energy regeneration control. A mild level of regeneration is there by default, but there's no option for one-pedal driving. It was missed when driving through town, and the only level of adjustability was the Cruise mode, which reduces high-speed regen to make for smoother driving on faster roads.

I also didn't fully bond with the ë-C3's almost oblong steering wheel. It was easy enough to turn in most cases but awkward in tighter corners, and generally I struggled to grip the darn thing. The Renault 5 and Dolphin Surf are much more accommodating in this regard, although you could say the same for anything with a regular circular steering wheel.

Despite its shortcomings, though, the ë-C3 is a characterful little electric car with bags of personality. It was a regular talking point among friends, family and members of the public, many of whom admired its packaging and styling.

But our original reason for running this electric Citroën supermini was to find out if it was a match for the class-leading Renault 5. So is it? The 5 is more well rounded in terms of refinement and driver engagement, but the ë-C3 still scores highly in many areas. It might not match its fellow French rival for all-round ability, but it certainly does for charm.

JACK WARRICK

SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE
jack.warrick@haymarket.com

TEST DATA

CITROEN E-C3 44KWH MAX

MILEAGE

At start 1120
At end 3799

PRICES

List price new £23,795
List price now £23,040 (after EV grant)
Price as tested £24,490

OPTIONS

Elixir Red paint with black roof £695

ECONOMY AND RANGE

Claimed range 199 miles
Battery 44.2/43.7kWh (total/usable)
Test average 3.4mpkWh
Test best 4.5mpkWh
Test worst 2.8mpkWh
Real-world range 149 miles
Max charge rate 100kW

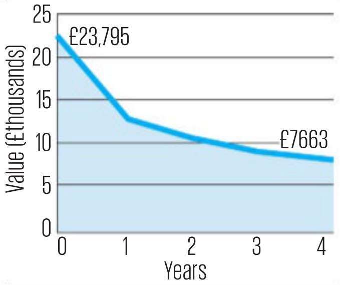
TECH HIGHLIGHTS

0-62mph 10.4sec
Top speed 84mph
Engine Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Max power 111bhp
Max torque 92lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, FWD
Boot 310 litres
Wheels 7.5Jx17in
Tyres 205/50 R17 93V, Goodyear EfficientGrip Performance 2
Kerb weight 1416kg

SERVICE AND RUNNING COSTS

Contract hire rate £235 pcm
CO_2 0g/km
Service costs None
Other costs None
Fuel costs £205
Running costs including fuel £205
Cost per mile 8 pence
Faults None

DEPRECIATION



PREVIOUS REPORTS

18 Jun, 2 Jul, 9 Jul, 16 Jul, 30 Jul, 6 Aug, 13 Aug, 27 Aug, 10 Sep, 17 Sep

LOVE IT

STYLING
It isn't for everyone, but the shape and design of the ë-C3 are not only a talking point but also ideal for practicality.

INTERIOR SPACE
Lots of leg room, no bashed heads and a big boot are all thanks to the ë-C3's impressively packaged interior.

EQUIPMENT
Even in basic spec, the ë-C3 has everything you need for daily driving. Our car's Max trim added desirable premium features.

LOATHE IT

NO KEYLESS ENTRY
A vital missing feature that caught me out every time. Plus, you still have to put the key in the ignition. In 2025!

EFFICIENCY FAILINGS
The absence of a trip computer plus poor cruising efficiency added a touch of anxiety to longer journeys.

CLASSIC AND SPORTSCAR
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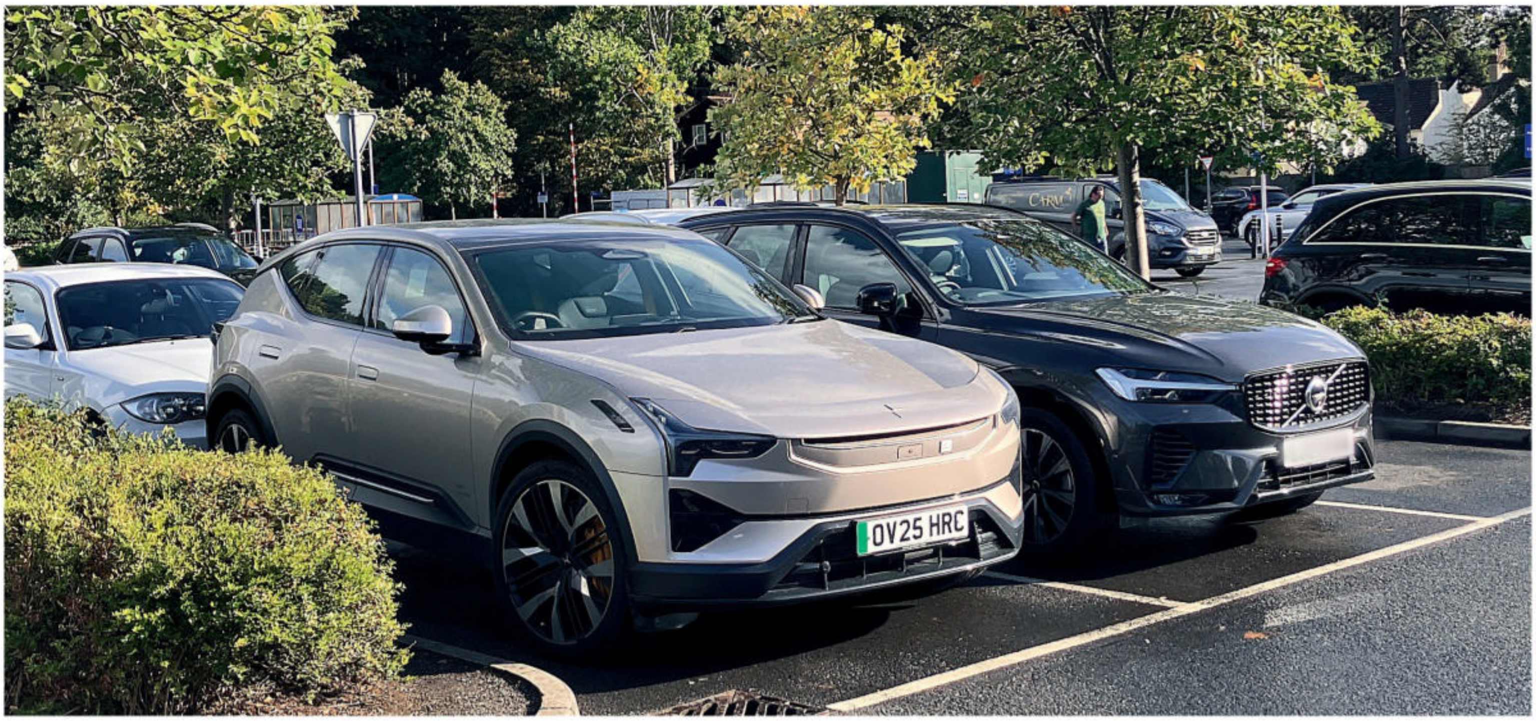


POLESTAR 3

Lots of us have asked for a go – and we've all had lots to say afterwards

MILEAGE 3622

WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT Is this new luxury EV as compelling as its spec sheet and unique look suggest?

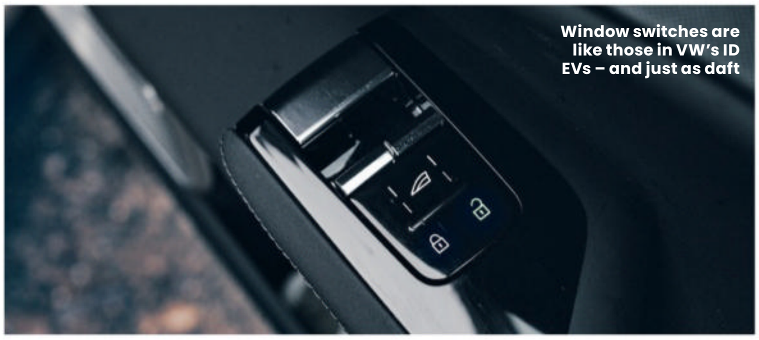
You can tell how in demand the Polestar 3 has been by looking at the text messages on my phone. As predominantly a WhatsApp user, the old-fashioned SMS app is one I rarely use, so most recent contacts have something in common: they've been sent a digital key to the 3.

Yes, yes, the key again, or rather the lack of a physical key... In short, nobody who has driven the 3 likes the lack of a physical key with lock and unlock buttons. I'll spare you a blow-by-blow account of deputy editor Felix Page's particularly negative experience with it, as I would run out of space on this page, but I will share his sign-off.

"I used to lend my old 1972 VW Beetle to a mate every so often, and while I did indeed have to send him something beforehand, it was only a text to say the key was under the blue flowerpot by the side gate. How far we've come."

Quite. Thankfully, the second and dominant impression of the 3 that has come back is just how good it is to drive.

Classic & Sports Car editor-in-chief Alastair Clements had a go, and during a phone call to let me know that he had eventually got in after the key didn't work and the car wouldn't unlock, he went on to remark that when he did get going, the 3 felt like a second-generation Jaguar I-Pace in its execution.



Window switches are like those in VW's ID EVs – and just as daft

"There's that same quiet authority to the ride, which is pretty much as good as any modern on huge rims that I've driven," he told me. "And it's dynamically much more interesting than a Volvo, with nicely fluid steering and good balance for such a big car."

The family resemblance to the Polestar 2 in the way it drives is also shining through (Page's main takeaway was that the 3 is "everything I like about the Polestar 2 in a larger and more eye-catching shell"), and while the smaller car does a good impression of a fellow dynamic all-rounder like the BMW 3 Series, so the larger model is increasingly winning out as a fast grand tourer.

Associate editor James Attwood wafted along the M4 and M5 over a weekend, where he found the 3 to be an "incredibly pleasant motorway cruiser", and he also made good use of its brisk charging speeds to keep time off the road to a minimum, like with all good long-legged GTs.

One thing that has left a few of us scratching our heads is the size of the car, initially in trying to typecast it. As I remarked in my introductory report, the 3 isn't really anything we know in a conventional sense; it's effectively a jacked-up estate with a futuristic, rakish body.

Clements papped the 3 next to a Volvo XC60 (above), demonstrating their identical heights, which shows just how low and sleek the 3 is when compared with the Volvo EX90 on which it's based.

Enter deputy road test editor Richard Lane. "The SUV-ness or otherwise is an interesting topic. The Polestar 3 is a seriously clever bit of design. It isn't really an SUV when you properly take the design in; it just gives off the cues people like about SUVs. It's more like one of Volvo's old Cross Country models amped up 15%. A bit of a spiritual successor to the 850 T5-R too – but it handles!"

What the 3 lacks in height, it makes up for in length and width. Attwood is among those who have found it a squeeze on smaller roads and also found the high rear window line makes it a challenge to get good visibility when reversing. Everyone wished for proper physical controls for the mirrors, mainly to help with reversing.

The theme emerging is that the 3 is a truly original piece of product design that's backed up with real dynamic substance but let down by poorly executed technology.

It's not even a case of getting used to it, because the more I and others drive the 3, the more frustrating some of the bad tech gets – not just in the execution but also for how it begins to undermine what is otherwise such a high-quality car.

MARK TISSHAW

LOVE IT

CIVIL PACE

Felix Page: "It's astoundingly quick when you hoof it but wholly composed and untroubled in more everyday, low-speed chuggery."

LOATHE IT

WINDOW SWITCHES

Alastair Clements: "Instead of a switch for each window, there are two switches, plus two more to select front or rear. It just adds another step to the process."

TEST DATA

POLESTAR 3 LONG RANGE DUAL MOTOR PERFORMANCE PACK

Price new £81,500 **Price as tested** £90,800
Faults Faulty locking system **Expenses** None
Range 240 miles **Economy** 2.3mpkWh
Last seen 17.9.25

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8 AHM	£12,995
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8I9 JAY	£7,995
700 K	£29,995
ARI5BUS	£1,295
JMBIJ	£3,995

QUIRKY RANGE

Plate	Price
AU70CAR	£6,995
RADID	£6,995
MEDI4A	£5,995

ULTIMATE INVESTMENT RANGE

Plate	Price
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I40X	£24,995
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I 00C	£19,995
KCN I	£19,995
I X0X	£29,995
I VTV	£14,995
I VDN	£13,995

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Plate	Price
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AII5HAB	£6,995
NAD74A	£4,995
GUL74M	£4,995
N486 ELA	£4,995 (Nabella)
UDDIP	£3,995
M4X VW	£2,995
RI EHN	£9,995

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333 UXX	£1,495
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MAZDA CX-80

Big SUV faces our resident cyclist's big practicality test

MILEAGE 3386
WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT To see if Mazda has improved on the CX-60 and find its ranking among big SUVs

Culmer didn't have to read the manual – and didn't trap any fingers

With summer fast fading away, my mate and I were determined not to waste a sunny Saturday and so decided to get on our bikes.

Slight issue: as online forums soon revealed, I was just one of many cyclists unfortunate enough to experience a jammed through-axle, so I was unable to remove my bike's front wheel. (Honestly, the creator of this particular one should be banned from designing things.) So this ride might have been over before it had even begun, or at least needed moving to a dull urban route starting at home, as the only boot that had ever accepted such a frame with both wheels attached was a monster truck called Land Cruiser.

Gingerly Ben and I manoeuvred all 29in of the wheel up to the rear of the CX-80. It wasn't looking good – but after several attempts at careful twisting, we just about squeezed it in. Huge, in both senses of the word.

Of course, this was after we had dealt with both the third and second rows of seats. With seven people aboard, there's a mere 258 litres of luggage space (about what you get in a Hyundai i10), growing to 687 in five-seat mode and ultimately 1971.

LOVE IT

KEEPING COOL

It has recently been hot in a horribly humid way, so it's not just after exercising that I've been grateful for all those little holes in the driver's seat.

LOATHE IT

SR SUNTOUR Q-LOC

Or if I'm not allowed to mention my bike's pesky through-axle here, then I'll say the amount of light-coloured cloth to watch out for in the extended boot.

This was actually a very easy process. Each third-row seat has a fabric strap on its back that you pull to release the mechanism, after which it can be pushed away. The middle seats (which are split 60:40, somewhat disappointingly) took me a minute to figure out but make total sense: the handle on the shoulders pulls them forward 45deg to allow third-row entry; the handle on the sides folds them flat; and the bar under the base lets them slide backwards and forwards on rails.

So happily Ben and I got to enjoy our ride on the Downs Link. If you live nearby, I highly recommend it: one of Dr Beeching's poor victims, it runs between Guildford (Surrey) and Shoreham-by-Sea (Sussex), and the old Christ's Hospital and West Grinstead stations are still there, signage and all, affording you the cool experience of riding down between the platforms.

At one point, a smiling driver told us we must have been mad, such was the weather. His car can't have had the benefit of ventilated seats: we quickly stopped being all hot and bothered with the CX-80 blasting freezing air not just into our faces but onto our backs and bums too. Glorious – as, I imagine, its seat heating would be in winter (yes, I did try to turn both on at once and, no, it doesn't let you).

There was time left in the day for one more hitch, though. While the boot is largely trimmed in the usual black fabric, the upper sides, upper second-row seatbacks, rear door cards and headlining are all covered in light material – and inevitably we got some dust and dirt on them. Panicked sponging ensued and all is now back to normal – but, much as I love a bright interior, you would be wise to choose the black option if you're going to use your SUV for any actual SUV activities.
KRIS CULMER

TEST DATA

MAZDA CX-80 2.5 E-SKYACTIV PHEV TAKUMI

Price new £53,880 **Price as tested** £56,730 **Faults** None **Expenses** None **Economy** 33.1mpg **Last seen** 10.9.25

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Beware pedals scratching the bumper – and tyres dirtying the headliner

SNAPSHOTS

RENAULT 5

Mileage 8867 **Last seen** 10.9.25
Time at last for some Renault 5 faults. The biggest one is the thickness of the windscreen pillars at the base. They can obscure things: our Mini Cooper, for instance. The second biggest is rear room. Don't attempt to put any generously sized adults in there: they will come out aching. An old VW Up or a Renault Clio is much better in this regard. **SC**

JAECOO 7

Mileage 543 **Last seen** 10.9.25
I was delighted to lift the 7's boot floor and discover a spare wheel. So few new cars come with them now, and I'm not a fan of those tins of get-you-home gunk. But why did Jaecoo specify a skinny spacesaver and then mount it on a polystyrene plinth that wastes a load of space? Without it, the boot floor could be lowered a good 20cm and give the car a useful boost in storage space. One for the facelift, perhaps? **AC**

VOLVO EX30

Mileage 3172 **Last seen** 17.9.25
When speccing this long-termer, Moss Yellow paint was non-negotiable. The backstory is fun: it was inspired by lichen found on the Swedish coast. But it's also a lovely colour: it's bright and stands out but just subtle enough in tone that the car isn't garish like, say, our Renault 5. What a shame, then, that it's no longer offered. The five options now are all somewhat drab. Even the brightest, Sand Dune, is more beige that bright. **JA**

USED CARS

HOW TO BUY AN ASTON MARTIN DB11

WHEN ASTON MARTIN UPPED ITS GRAND TOURING GAME

The DB11 redefined Gaydon's GTs, but now they're surprisingly affordable

Aston Martin's 'DB' lineage of sporting GTs began in 1948 with the DB1, the first product under the ownership of David Brown. By 2016 Aston was 12 years into production of the elegant DB9, but that car was starting to feel behind the times, and sales and profits were on the decline.

Then the DB11 arrived, with a new, more aggressive design by Marek Reichman, proven Mercedes tech and a snarling V12. The first car of Aston's revolutionary 'Second Century' plan also had a new aluminium platform, electric power steering, multi-link rear suspension and torque vectoring by braking.

We liked it – so much, in fact, that we named it a Game Changer at the 2017 Autocar Awards and one of our top five cars of the year.

Eight years later, dramatic depreciation means you can now pick up this era-defining GT for less than the price of a new Ford Mustang or Alpine A110 – in other words, a third of what it cost new.

At launch, the DB11 came exclusively with that 5.2-litre twin-turbo V12, with 600bhp and 516lb ft. Based on the unit used in the DB9, it is fundamentally an evolution of a design that goes back to the mid-1990s, but it's a reliable lump and was modified so extensively that it feels bang up to date even now.

A year into production, a 503bhp Mercedes-AMG V8-powered DB11 joined the range. It not only weighed 115kg less than the V12 but, with 498lb ft, also had more torque per tonne. The V12 takes 3.9sec to reach 60mph, but the V8 needs only 0.1sec longer. And, if you're interested,

Cabin is impressively well appointed, but the tech feels dated today

What we said then

14 JUNE 2017

"It's superb, a 'proper' Aston Martin. It is rich and seductive in the way its V12 sounds yet newly vigorous in the urgency of its pace. It is more supple-riding, comfortable and long-legged than any DB car in history and yet capable of setting a benchmark lap that's a closer match for that of a Porsche 911 Turbo S than a Bentley Continental GT3-R. The DB11 is easily the greatest single step forward that its maker has yet taken."

fuel economy climbs from 24.8mpg to 28.5mpg.

The V8 also addressed some criticisms levelled at the early cars, chiefly that the suspension didn't firm up enough for twisty roads and the steering felt too artificially assisted. The modifications to rectify both issues boosted the DB11's sporting credentials without sacrificing comfort.

To tell the V12 and V8 apart, look at the bonnet: the V12 has four vents, the V8 two.

In 2018, Aston extended the V8 upgrades to the V12; it also bestowed upon it an extra 30bhp, thanks to a less restrictive exhaust, and the 0-60mph time dropped to 3.7sec. In 2021, the V8 received a boost to 528bhp and 513lb ft.

Both engines sound excellent, the V12 being slightly more special – and particularly so in the drop-top Volante. Maybe the DB9's atmospheric powerplant has the aural edge, but these newer cars are more drivable and well behaved.

The outdated interior was always a weak point of the DB11. In 2016 it was just about acceptable, but even then it didn't use Mercedes' latest infotainment system. By the end of production the tech was very dated, being slow, small and lacking phone connectivity.

Happily, the rest of the cabin is much better, with solid-feeling build quality and extensive use of leather, wood and Alcantara, although the Mercedes column stalks do feel a little plasticky.

Now is a great time to buy: there's a plethora of low-mileage, as-new cars with few owners and full service histories. Put your money into a high-spec, classic colour combo and it should be a relatively sensible extravagance, but be aware that even the best examples are likely to carry on depreciating for now, not least because the DB12 that took over in 2023 is improved in most areas.

ALEX WOLSTENHOLME

Early handling criticisms were addressed for the V8 and with later V12s

> **"Both engines sound excellent, but the V12 is more special – and particularly so in the Volante"**

How to get one in your garage

AN OWNER'S VIEW

JEREMY WAYNE

"I've put almost 20,000 miles on my V12 in less than two years. One of the window motors broke, and it needed new spark plugs due to a misfire, but nothing else has gone wrong with it.

"The Aston is my daily driver, and until now I've averaged 15.5mpg in it. It always gets positive attention, especially when I drop the kids off at school in the snow. My only other car is a Lotus Emira, for fun roads.

"I love the sound, the look, the smell and the leather. The in-car tech isn't great, but the small integrated infotainment screen stops it from looking dated. Interior quality is fantastic: the shift paddles are masterpieces – perfectly weighted and their metal click is sublime – and the headliner is a thing of beauty. It's a special place to be, and people are always in awe when they see inside.

"It's probably my favourite of all the cars I've ever owned."

BUYER BEWARE...

■ ENGINE AND GEARBOX

The Mercedes-Benz V8, Ford-built V12 and eight-speed ZF automatic gearbox are all familiar units and come with a proven reliability record. But even so, look for cars with a minimum of one service per year, because main dealers are more likely to fix a fault for free if the car is out of warranty but has a full Aston Martin service history.

■ INTERIOR

Mostly very well built, but some owners have reported the dashboard leather shrinking if left in the sun. Aftermarket Apple CarPlay/Android Auto conversions are a boon.

■ ELECTRICS

Steering column motors, haptic sensors in the dashboard and button control panels have all been known to fail, but most have been replaced by Aston for free, even if the car is out of warranty.

■ BODY

Boot struts are known to break, as is the 'aeroblade' spoiler. Some owners have had damaged roof strakes, which can begin to leak. Most will have been fixed, though.

■ WHEELS

Look for cars with Michelin tyres instead of the standard-fit Bridgestones; they suit the nature of the car much better.

ALSO WORTH KNOWING

The V8/V12 mix in the classifieds is roughly half and half. Only one in five are convertible Volantes, and all of those are V8s, specifically the higher-tuned unit with 513lb ft to compensate for the open-top car's extra 110kg.

The 11 was the first DB model without a manual gearbox (and the first with an electronic handbrake), and as such you only need to choose a car based on the engine, roof and any options.

The AMR upgrade on early V12s is desirable. The AMR engine tweaks can be retrofitted for a 30bhp boost, but you won't get any of the suspension and steering changes.

HOW MUCH TO SPEND

£55,000-£64,999

Mostly early V12s. A lot of car for the money at this price point, and the tech isn't too disappointing compared with contemporaries.

£65,000-£79,999

Plenty of high-spec, low-mile V8 and V12 coupés with few owners. Like-for-like V8s and V12s are worth roughly the same money.

£80,000-£99,999

Later V8s and V12s with their respective updates, as well as a plethora of convertibles.

£100,000 AND ABOVE

Last-of-the-line, nearly new examples. A DB12 requires another £50,000 jump.

ONE WE FOUND

ASTON MARTIN DB11 V12, 2017, 35,000 MILES, £62,980

After eight years and just 35,000 miles, you can secure yourself this DB11 for one-third of the price it was new. It's a desirable Launch Edition, too, in dark blue with matching leather.

My car & I

Damn the expense, this 944 is a keeper

If the definition of sailing is standing under a shower tearing up tenners, then surely owning a classic car is standing under an inspection ramp doing likewise. Just ask Peter Foot. He has recently spent a small fortune on his 1990 H-reg Porsche 944 cabriolet. "I've just had all the fuel lines changed to cope with E10 and E5 fuel, for around £2000," he says. "Also, it has a power roof, and you are supposed to oil the cables regularly. I didn't and they snapped. That was £3000."

You would think all this expense would be the end of 944 ownership for Peter, but in for a penny, in for a pound: "It's a keeper, like all my classic cars, especially with the amount of money we throw at them. You never get it back."

If you doubt his commitment, just consider that Peter has already owned the car for 14 years. "I had two Beetle convertibles in my twenties but was always looking at 944s because they were so much prettier," he says. "I do like 911s, but they're far too expensive. Instead, you can pick 944s up from £10,000."

In spite of the repair bills, Peter loves his car. "When the engine comes on cam at 4000rpm it gives you an extra shove in the back," he continues. "Yesterday, I was joining

Our cars

Piling on the miles in my practical pick-up

BY STEVE CROPLEY

Familiar problem with the Ford Ranger Raptor: too many miles. When I bought it from Ford 15 months ago, taking it over from my pod-mate Matt Prior who drove it from new, it showed 13,000 miles. Now it's just turning 28,000, which means I've averaged more than 1000 miles a month despite putting many more miles on other machines, both test cars and my own.

I'm not sure how this has happened. All I know is that despite its bulk and conspicuity, it makes a great job of the things I most expect from a car at home: cruising with the missus, taking four passengers in comfort, carrying awkward stuff, towing my bike trailer, standing out in a crowd – it did that brilliantly while serving as the MC's platform at the BMM's Petrol & Pride event (right) – and making me happy when I drive it.

The Raptor always feels special. Its elevated driving position gives an unparalleled view of the countryside. It is unfailingly comfortable and (if you can cope with a bit of road roar) pretty quiet.

Costs are a concern. It recently went to Ford Gloucester for its second service, at 24,000 miles. That set me back £550, so not terrible, but my past year's 15,000 miles' worth of fuel at 25mpg (and it doesn't always do that well) amounts to £3500, which is somewhat eye-watering.

But I take the view that nearly every one of those miles has been driven for personal reasons, which mostly means pleasure. I don't drink or smoke or buy expensive clothes. Never have. Instead, I buy fuel for the Raptor – and plan to keep it that way.

It's not small and doesn't blend in, but the Raptor is a perfect fit in Cropley's life

Power roof's cables need oiling. Peter forgot and it cost him £3000. Ouch

Interior is pretty tidy for a 35-year-old, but body rust is becoming a problem

the motorway in second gear and it just took off! It's also a very torquey engine and, because it has twin balancer shafts, very smooth."

Away from spirited slip-road entrances, the 944 is a great GT, reckons Peter: "It's not a loud or overtly sporty car; it's a tourer, although I've had the suspension upgraded with Bilstein shocks. As a convertible it suffers from scuttle shake and can be a little crashy on our terrible roads, but the Bilsteins are more absorbent and forgiving."

Now 35 years old, the car is inevitably showing its age. "Rust is the issue," says Peter. "This morning, I noticed some on the lower corner of the offside front wheel arch where it meets the sill. I've had the sills sprayed internally with rustproofing but, clearly, they still rust! Also, exclusively on the cabrio, rust takes hold on the door tops. Mine have been painted four times. I got so fed up I replaced a section of one door with a piece cut from a used one. It's a design fault: water collects below the door-top rubbers and rusts the door. I've spent a fortune dealing with it."

Like the expensive fuel lines, Peter has his eye on preventative maintenance. "The 944's starter and fan relays are notorious for going dry and breaking the solder," he explains. "You suddenly can't start the engine, or the fan doesn't come on. To prevent future problems I've replaced them with new solid-state relays from the US. They won't break."

Elsewhere, Peter would like to replace the boot carpet: "It's moulded around the spare wheel and battery, but the problem with it is that the foam backing breaks down and you can't get a replacement. It's a shame because it spoils the look of the boot."

A shame but not a deal-breaker. Like many classic car owners, Peter is too invested in his 944 to abandon it over a shabby carpet.

JOHN EVANS

> **"It suffers from scuttle shake and can be a little crashy, but the Bilsteins are more forgiving"**

Head to head

SAM PHILLIPS

1992 LANCIA DELTA HF INTEGRALE

VS

JACK WARRICK

2004 LAMBORGHINI GALLARDO

Brief: Find a soul-stirring Italian car for no more than £75,000 – and no Ferraris allowed

SP Rally-bred hot hatches don't get more exhilarating than the Lancia Delta Integrale. This homologation special has the potent 16V engine with 182bhp and 224lb ft. It costs £39,995, so it's well within budget.

JW Mine's one of the most desired early-2000s poster cars: the Lamborghini Gallardo. This £74,995 5.0 V10 behemoth has 494bhp, and it's a manual!

SP Silver with silver wheels – is that the best you can do? A Lambo has to have a lairy paint scheme – it's the rules. Sure, that V10/gated manual combo is sublime, but it could at least stand out…

JW The previous owner was more classy than that. Your Lancia is as cool as they come, but I'd be scared to enjoy it. Good job it's had a new timing belt and gearbox; otherwise, the budget you've saved might be far smaller…

SP That Lambo's got nothing on the Giorgetto Giugiaro lines of my Delta. And if it has had all that work done, it will feel as taut and agile as the day it left the factory – and it's almost half the price of your Audi, sorry, Lamborghini.

JW At least you can use your 'official Lancia toolkit' to bolt it back together when it falls apart.

CAUGHT IN THE CLASSIFIEDS

VOLKSWAGEN AMAROK 3.0 TDI V6 TECH HIGHLINE

2017, 47,000 miles, £25,072

This Amarok has a muscular 221bhp V6 and looks to be in great shape, with a solid history and long MOT. It also has heated seats, a fixed towbar and a reversing camera, and only two owners from new.

LAND ROVER DEFENDER 90 2.5 TD5 XS

2005, 156,000 miles, £14,995

Few cars have the charm and capability of a Defender 90, and this TD5 looks ready for anything thanks to its snorkel and underbody protection. It has an MOT until April next year, and with regular maintenance it should serve you well.

MITSUBISHI L200 2.5 CHALLENGER

2015, 56,000 miles, £9995

The L200 is robust and dependable, and despite its commercial roots, this one has a decent level of equipment, including cruise control. It has an advisory-free recent MOT and only one previous owner.

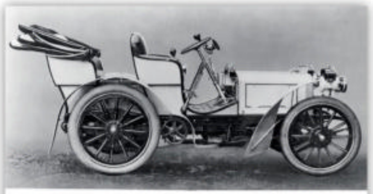
DACIA DUSTER 1.3 TCE EXPRESSION EDC

2024, 5500 miles, £16,500

Commercial Dusters are rare beasts these days, but this one is good value and ideal if you regularly carry tools or piles of stuff destined for the tip. It's only a year and 5000 miles old.

The Autocar

Lost in the archive



1901 MERCEDES 35HP

The first bearer of perhaps motoring's most famous brand name and widely regarded as the first modern car, thanks mainly to its low-mounted engine. "The manner in which the gear lever is moved to obtain the desired speed is novel, simple and certain," said Autocar.

1902 MERCEDES SIMPLEX

Like the 35hp but bigger, stronger and fancier. "Owners need not fear annoyances by the police, as the car runs so quietly, and is slowed down so easily and instantaneously," a dealer promised.

1903 FORD MODEL A

Ford's very first car. "A car like this is a bargain at any reasonable figure," claimed Henry – $800, or about £22,000 in today's money.

1904 ROVER 8

Formative bicycle maker's first car was distinguished by its unusual backbone chassis. We enjoyed a "delightful sense of comfort and liveliness" and had it "under the most perfect control" in traffic.

1905 PEUGEOT BEBE

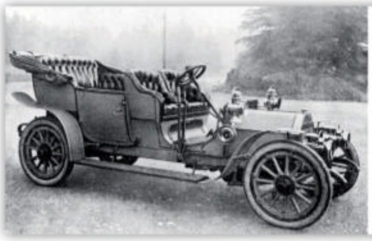
The success of the cheap 'Baby' series, particularly in Britain, spurred the Peugeot family to take car making more seriously, starting with this Type 69.

1906 ROLLS-ROYCE SILVER GHOST

This "sweet, willing soul" covered the length of Britain non-stop without trouble. "Each successive Rolls-Royce seems sweeter, silkier and sleeker in running than the one before," we swooned.

1907 BUGATTI TYPE 10

This prototype for Ettore's first own-brand car would become the Type 13 – a "delightful little runabout", said Autocar, that would win Bugatti fame on the track when revived in the 1920s.

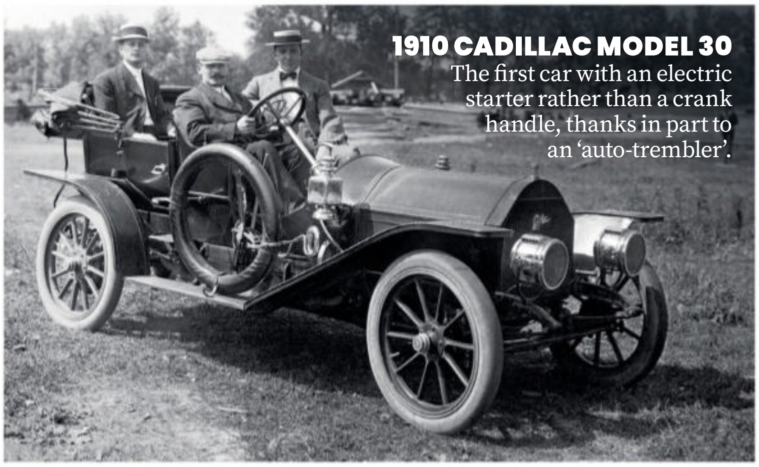


1908 LANCIA ALFA

Celebrated racer and engineer "brings his long experience to bear in an unmistakable and praiseworthy manner", his debut car being an "excellent and in parts original design".

1909 FORD MODEL T

It was tricky to drive, but revolutionary production methods made it amazingly affordable, such that half of all cars in America were Model Ts for a time. It was the first Ford made in Britain too.



1910 CADILLAC MODEL 30

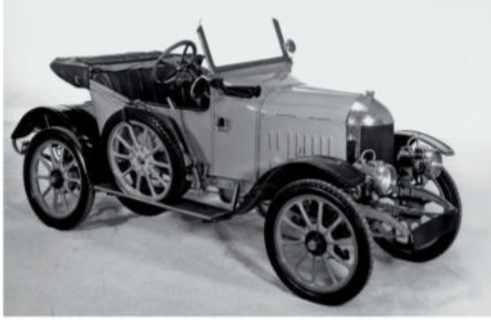
The first car with an electric starter rather than a crank handle, thanks in part to an 'auto-trembler'.

1911 VAUXHALL PRINCE HENRY

"A particularly fast, light car for road work, seating four, with a chassis of distinct design," we said. Possibly the world's first proper sports car, then.

1912 MORGAN RUNABOUT

Railway engineer's first automotive affair made motoring more widely accessible. We found the two-seat three-wheeler was "far more suitable for high-speed sporting work" than its many rival cycle cars.



1913 MORRIS OXFORD

The 'Bullnose' "created a most favourable impression on account of its excellence of design". A light four yet "possessing all the attributes of a full-size car", it was "excellent value".

We've been celebrating the best cars from the first 25 years of the 21st century. Now let's revisit the heroes of the first quarter of the 20th century

25 FOR 25

1914 DODGE 30-35

"The Dodge Brothers car possesses characteristics seldom indeed encountered in a vehicle selling at anything like this price, namely £210."

1915 PACKARD TWIN SIX

This luxurious American was the first V12 production car. "The idea is to produce a more perfect running engine by means of the perfect natural balance" – and boy did it work.

1916 CADILLAC TYPE 51

The first mass-produced V8 car. "It is really difficult to convey on paper any idea of the delight of the running," we gushed. "One may indulge in superlatives and yet fall short of producing the real impression of satisfaction."

1917 MITSUBISHI MODEL A

We didn't know about it at the time, but this saloon, made by a famous shipbuilder, was hugely significant as the first Japanese car – even if it was basically a Fiat.

1918 CITROEN TYPE A

So popular was this "car of light weight, moderate power and convenient size" that it arguably turned a French start-up into Europe's first mass manufacturer of cars.

1919 HISPANO-SUIZA H6

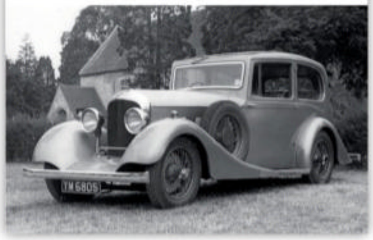
"Whether it be judged from the standpoint of speed, flexibility, silence, brakes, springing, workmanship or design", this Swiss-designed, Paris-built luxury car "is more than capable of holding its own among the world's best".

1920 ROVER 8HP

British newcomer pleasingly "fills the gap between the motorcycle-and-sidecar combination and the small but now expensive light car" to the benefit of "the family motorist of limited means".

1921 BENTLEY 3-LITRE

Initial roadster's litheness and effortless performance gave us "fierce, wild intoxication", before the long-wheelbase tourer proved "comfortable and docile yet powerful".



1922 LANCIA LAMBDA

Highly innovative as the first car with a monocoque and the first with all-independent suspension. It had brakes all round, too, and a compact V4. "In one or two cases a machine possesses what in a human is termed a soul. Such a car, undoubtedly, is the Lambda."

1923 TATRA T11

This was the first car with the Czech firm's famous backbone tube chassis, swinging half-axles and air-cooled engine – which later inspired the 21st century's best-selling car, the Volkswagen Beetle.

1924 ALFA ROMEO P2

Along with the Bugatti Type 35, this straight-eight beauty would dominate grand prix racing for a decade to come.

1925 HANOMAG 2/10PS

We called it a "queer freak", the German public nicknamed it the 'bread loaf' and it sold poorly, but this miniature set the template for all future design by integrating the wings into the body.

If you want to get lost in the archive...

Scan the QR code to gain access to Autocar issues from 1895 to the present day.

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DEAL KENT, CT14 6BQ	01304 373434
DERBY, DE1 2ED	01332 290931
DONCASTER, DN2 4NY	01302 245999
DUNDEE, DD1 3ET	01382 225140
EDINBURGH, EH8 7BR	0131 659 5919
EXETER, EX2 8QG	01392 256744
GATESHEAD, NE8 4XA	0191 493 2520
GLASGOW, G4 9EJ	0141 332 9231
GLOUCESTER, GL1 4HY	01452 417948
GRIMSBY, DN32 9BD	01472 354435
HULL, HU9 1EG	01482 223161
ILFORD, IG2 7HU	0208 518 4286
IPSWICH, IP1 1UZ	01473 221253
LEEDS, LS4 2AS	0113 231 0400
LEICESTER, LE4 6PN	0116 261 0688
LINCOLN, LN5 8HG	01522 543036
LIVERPOOL, L3 5NF	0151 709 4484
LONDON CATFORD, SE6 3ND	0208 695 5684
LONDON EDM'TON, N18 020	0208 803 0861
LONDON LEYTON, E10 7EB	0208 558 8284
LUTON, LU4 8JS	01582 728063
MAIDSTONE, ME15 6HE	01622 769572
MC CENTRAL, M8 8DU	0161 241 1851
MC OPENSHAW, M11 1AA	0161 223 8376
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ROAD TEST RESULTS

Autocar's history of empirical road testing is the longest in the world. For more than a century, we have been verifying, scrutinising, describing and illustrating new cars in unparalleled detail. Driving impressions have always been a key part of this, around which the empirical tests have changed.

In pre-war years, we concerned ourselves with braking effort, gradient climbing capability and rolling resistance. Later our attention shifted to take in acceleration, top speed, stopping distance and cruising noise level.

Today we use the Horiba MIRA proving ground in the Midlands to take similar performance benchmarks of new cars – and we've recently expanded the test's remit to take in braking stamina over repeated stops and, in the case of electrified cars, DC rapid-charging performance and measured acceleration at both high and low indicated states of battery charge.

Our tests are designed first and foremost to assess the fitness for intended purpose of any given new car – and to do it better and more thoroughly than any other independent test there is.

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Matt Saunders, road test editor

STAR RATINGS EXPLAINED

Autocar star ratings aren't like those you may read elsewhere. We don't simply give the best car in any given class five stars, the worst one star and filter the rest in between.

Rather than thinking in entirely relative terms, we rank cars according to more abstract definitions of their performance, functionality and fitness for purpose, so that every particular verdict means something and has a degree of permanence.

We also penalise cars up to a star for what we consider particularly conspicuous and regressive failings concerning active safety systems or missing instrumentation or physical secondary controls.

☆ Hopeless, egregious. In some cases, potentially dangerous.
⯪ Appalling. An emphatic failure.
★ Very poor. Consistently flawed or seriously misconceived.
★⯪ Inadequate. Sub-standard in key areas.
★★ Mediocre. Acceptable at best.
★★⯪ Competent. Mostly average, with very few highlights.
★★★ Respectable. Consistently decent, with some strengths.
★★★⯪ Good. Well rounded and competitive in key areas.
★★★★ Very good. Sets some new class standards and misses few.
★★★★⯪ Excellent. Extends several key class standards.
★★★★★ Exceptional, unsurpassed. All but flawless.

ABARTH

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
500 Esseesse ★★★★☆ 25.3.09 Charm on a stick. Raucous and fun.	7.6	6.5	1135	35.8	-
500e Turismo ★★★⯪☆ 9.8.23 A stylish and entertaining pint-size EV but pricey and needs refining.	6.9	6.4	1395	-	142
595 Competizione ★★★⯪☆ 26.2.14 Great when it's good but tiring when it's bad.	7.5	6.4	1135	39.2	-

ALFA ROMEO

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Giulia Quadrifoglio ★★★★⯪ 29.3.17 Everything you would want a fast Alfa Romeo saloon to be. A triumph.	4.5	3.2	1700	35.7	-
Stelvio 2.2D 210 Milano Edizione ★★★⯪☆ 3.1.18 Likeable, if short of class's usual refinements.	6.8	7.0	1815	49.7	-
Stelvio Quadrifoglio ★★★⯪☆ 9.1.19 A real driver's car, but it stretches SUV-related bounds of acceptability.	4.0	3.3	1931	31.9	-
Stelvio 2.0T 280 Veloce AWD ★★★★☆ 28.6.23 Short on premium refinement but meets its discreetly sporty brief well.	5.7	5.3	1784	32.2	-

ALPINE

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
A110 Première Edition ★★★★★ 16.5.18 Hilarious fun delivered in effusive and accessible fashion.	4.7	3.8	1125	45.6	-
A110 Légende GT ★★★★⯪ 9.3.22 The best fast A110 we've seen but not quite the definitive version.	4.8	3.9	1140	40.2	-
A110 R ★★★⯪☆ 15.11.23 Hardcore A110 has its lures but probably not enough of them for its price.	4.2	3.5	1094	39.7	-

ARIEL

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Atom 4 ★★★★★ 9.10.19 Track-slayer is unrivalled for built-in quality and dynamic character.	3.2	2.4	680	39.2	-

ASTON MARTIN

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Vantage ★★★★⯪ 18.9.24 Baby Aston grows up to spectacular effect. A machine of stunning breadth and likeability.	3.5	2.6	1745	28.5	-
DBS Superleggera ★★★★★ 21.11.18 Effortlessly fast and intoxicating to drive, the big Aston is better than ever.	3.7	2.7	1910	25.6	-
Vanquish ★★★★⯪ 26.3.25 Aston's blown V12 lives on in a devastatingly effective super-GT.	3.1	2.3	1951	25.8	-
DBX 707 ★★★★☆ 30.11.22 A better DBX to drive, but still leaves room for improvement.	3.3	2.8	2278	26.2	-

AUDI

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
A1 Sportback 35 TFSI S Line Style Edition ★★★⯪☆ 2.10.19 Luxury supermini lacks the polish to justify its high price.	7.9	8.4	1209	57.0	-
S3 Sportback ★★★⯪☆ 18.11.20 Audi delivers an effective if somewhat unlovable hot hatch.	4.8	4.2	1552	39.0	-
RS3 Sportback Carbon Vorsprung ★★★★☆ 9.7.25 Uber-A3 refuses to be defined just by its truly special five-cylinder engine.	3.6	3.3	1619	34.1	-
S5 Launch Edition ★★★★☆ 15.1.25 Rounded sports saloon with a characterful V6 and new-found dose of driver appeal.	4.1	3.8	2027	33.7	-
A6 50 TFSIe Quattro S Line ★★★★☆ 5.1.22 Hybrid tech boosts saloon's refinement, charm and running credentials.	5.7	5.2	2077	45.4	34
S6 E-tron Avant Launch Edition ★★★⯪☆ 16.4.25 Strong technical showing is undermined by price and lack of discernible character.	3.7	2.9	2346	2.8	256
RS6 Avant GT ★★★★☆ 5.2.25 Retro visual charm meets unprecedented dynamism in big-hearted estate.	3.2	2.7	2144	26.3	-
A7 Sportback 50 TDI Quattro Sport ★★★⯪☆ 11.7.18 Easy on the eye and to live with but let down by stolid dynamics.	5.8	5.3	1880	53.1	-
A8 L 60 TFSIe Quattro Sport ★★★⯪☆ 17.6.20 Technically impressive but not as cosseting as a limo ought to be.	-	-	2330	-	-
E-tron 55 Quattro ★★★★⯪ 26.6.19 A rounded, uber-luxurious addition to the premium EV niche.	5.4	4.2	2569	-	218
E-tron S Quattro ★★★⯪☆ 2.6.21 A slick, tech-laden luxury operator but no dynamic landmark for EVs.	4.2	3.6	2643	-	-
Q2 1.4 TFSI Sport ★★★⯪☆ 9.11.16 Fit for purpose but a less compelling option than it might have been.	8.1	8.2	1316	-	-
SQ2 Quattro S Tronic ★★★★☆ 20.3.19 More fun than you might expect from a crossover or an Audi S model.	4.5	4.1	1530	34.5	-
Q4 E-tron 40 Sport ★★★⯪☆ 7.7.21 Practical, pleasant and efficient but not a superior premium product.	8.1	7.8	2112	-	-
Q5 TDI Quattro 204PS S Line ★★★⯪☆ 14.5.25 Pleasant and competitive but no particular step forward.	6.7	7.1	2072	42.6	-
Q6 E-tron Quattro Edition 1 ★★★⯪☆ 2.10.24 EV is hard to love, easier to recommend, with good dynamics and strong EV credentials.	5.3	4.3	-	2.8	247
Q7 3.0 TDI Quattro S Line ★★★★☆ 12.8.15 Plush, suave and spacious but so-so to drive.	6.2	6.2	2245	-	-
SQ7 4.0 TDI Quattro ★★★★⯪ 26.10.16 A class-topping blend of superlative comfort and usable performance.	5.1	4.5	2330	37.9	-
Q8 50 TDI S Line ★★★★☆ 26.9.18 Striking and effective SUV-coupé leaves us wanting more.	6.9	6.7	2285	40.1	-
R8 V10 Plus ★★★★☆ 30.12.15 Supercar grips and goes even harder but wants for its predecessor's delicacy.	3.1	2.6	1730	-	-
S E-tron GT ★★★★☆ 2.4.25 Audi's super-EV holds great appeal in its purest form but isn't at the bleeding edge.	3.1	2.4	2361	2.8	262

BENTLEY

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Bentayga W12 ★★★★⯪ 18.5.16 Versatile, genteel, luxurious SUV with a silken sporting edge.	4.9	4.4	2440	-	-
Bentayga EWB Mulliner Blackline ★★★★☆ 24.4.24 Stretched SUV lacks the Mulsanne limo's charm but is a better luxury car by far.	4.4	3.8	2600	25.6	-
Continental GT Speed ★★★★☆ 22.12.21 Remains a wonderful grand tourer but can fall short as an entertainer.	3.4	2.7	2279	22.0	-
Continental GTC V8 S ★★★★⯪ 19.4.23 Sporty V8 execution adds vivacity to a car that makes you feel good.	3.6	3.2	2295	29.1	-
Continental GT Speed Hybrid First Edition ★★★★☆ 16.4.25 Electrons make fastest GT quicker but not necessarily better.	3.1	2.5	2462	28.0	47
Flying Spur Hybrid Mulliner ★★★★⯪ 17.8.22 Mightily convincing PHEV limo more than earns its Bentley wings.	4.4	3.9	2596	30.1	28

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Flying Spur Speed First Edition	★★★★☆	21.5.25	Hulking V8 hybrid powertrain broadens Spur's remit and skyrockets performance.	3.2	2.7	2750	26.7	44

BMW

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
120 M Sport	★★★⯪☆	31.12.24	Credible and complete junior BMW still lacks distinguishing driver appeal.	7.3	6.8	1489	45.8	-
218i M Sport Gran Coupé	★★★☆☆	8.4.20	Junior Gran Coupé hits some high notes but fails to inspire.	8.8	8.4	1375	58.2	-
220i M Sport Coupé	★★★★☆	1.6.22	A good coupé rather than a great sports car.	7.3	7.3	1546	46.8	-
M2 Coupé Manual	★★★★⯪	12.7.23	Junior M car takes huge objective leaps but smaller subjective ones.	4.5	3.8	1687	32.1	-
320d M Sport Auto	★★★★★	15.5.19	BMW's one-time default-choice executive saloon hits even greater heights.	6.9	6.8	1639	63.3	-
330d xDrive M Sport Plus Edition Touring	★★★★⯪	15.1.20	An estate that's powerful, classy and great to drive – but with a price to match.	5.5	5.2	1922	52.6	-
330e M Sport	★★★★⯪	1.7.20	Slicker and sweeter-handling than the average PHEV. A true 3 Series.	-	-	1740	-	-
M440i xDrive	★★★★☆	6.1.21	A rounded, engaging and potent coupé let down only by its looks.	4.1	3.7	1775	44.0	-
M4 Competition	★★★★⯪	21.4.21	A very modern M car and a brilliantly versatile and enjoyable one.	3.9	2.9	1800	32.7	-
M4 CS	★★★★☆	23.4.25	Stunning performance and pace comes with costs that aren't so easy to justify.	2.9	2.5	1747	32.4	-
i4 M50	★★★★☆	19.1.22	Fast, refined and with lots of traditional appeal to convert sceptics.	4.1	3.2	2248	-	186
M4 CSL	★★★★☆	16.11.22	A next-level M car, with the more complex temperament to match.	3.6	2.7	1625	31.1	-
M5	★★★⯪☆	29.1.25	A technical leap, but one born more out of necessity than inspiration.	3.5	2.8	2373	27.3	35
i5 eDrive40 M Sport Pro	★★★⯪☆	29.11.23	Has dynamic appeal but less convincing than BMW's other EV saloons.	5.4	4.4	2213	-	235
550e xDrive M Sport Pro	★★★★☆	3.4.24	Undeniably capable and a fine plug-in hybrid sports saloon.	4.4	3.5	2232	40.1	47
i7 xDrive60 M Sport	★★★★⯪	15.2.23	It has taken huge strides as a luxury car – and still drives like a BMW.	4.5	3.4	2758	-	264

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
840d xDrive	★★★★☆	16.1.19	A likeable big GT, albeit not the most luxurious or rewarding on sale.	5.0	4.6	1901	49.2	-
M8 Competition Convertible	★★★⯪☆	5.2.20	Has attitude to spare but isn't the complete super-GT.	3.3	2.7	2020	31.6	-
M8 Competition	★★★⯪☆	3.6.20	Highly capable but doesn't truly satisfy as either a sports car or a GT.	-	-	1960	-	-
X1 xDrive23i M Sport	★★★⯪☆	25.1.23	A decent family crossover but a poor BMW.	6.4	6.0	1800	45.6	-
X4 M Competition	★★★☆☆	13.11.19	Fast and precise, if short on the big-time charisma that you would expect.	4.0	3.3	2028	29.0	-
X5 xDrive30d M Sport	★★★★☆	2.1.19	Better to drive than the SUV norm but not better across the board.	6.6	6.6	2279	43.1	-
X6 M Competition	★★★☆☆	20.3.24	Unyielding performance focus makes for a fast but compromised SUV.	3.5	3.1	2442	29.3	-
X7 M60i xDrive	★★★★☆	29.3.23	Uncompromising-looking X7 is seriously fast but laudably refined.	4.2	3.7	2600	28.9	-
iX xDrive60 M Sport	★★★★⯪	9.7.25	Took the luxury EV to new heights in 2022 and nobody has caught up yet. Still great.	4.2	3.3	2637	2.7	314
Z4 M40i with Handschalter Pack	★★★★☆	21.8.24	Manual gearbox gives six-year-old roadster new depth.	5.7	5.9	1561	36.9	-

BMW ALPINA

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
B3 GT Touring	★★★★⯪	15.1.25	Last-dance B3 has mighty breadth and will go down as one of the all-time greats.	3.3	2.7	1910	29.4	-
B8 Gran Coupé	★★★★☆	22.9.21	Superbly rounded but lacking some dynamism implied by its looks.	3.5	2.8	2100	-	-

BYD

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Dolphin Surf Boost	★★★★☆	6.8.25	Efficient, well packaged and well priced. Its minor transgressions are forgivable.	12.0	13.0	1385	3.9	173
Atto 3 Design	★★★☆☆	31.5.23	Lack of attention to detail detracts from the impressive battery tech.	7.0	6.2	1787	-	201
Seal Design	★★★⯪☆	17.1.24	Frustrating software lets down the mostly impressive hardware.	5.8	4.7	2116	-	279

CATERHAM

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Seven 160	★★★★☆	20.11.13	Fun entry-level version of B-road toy smacks just a little of compromise.	8.4	8.7	510	44.8	-
Seven 620S	★★★★⯪	9.3.16	Supplies fun intravenously with a mix of freneticism and road-going usability.	3.8	4.2	650	29.5	-

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Seven 420 Cup	★★★★⯪	31.8.22	Track-day variant serves up sensational driving thrills – for a price.	4.2	3.4	560	35.3	-

CHEVROLET

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Corvette 3LT	★★★★☆	22.6.22	Big step up for charismatic, usable and temptingly priced American icon.	3.9	3.2	1679	32.9	-
Corvette Z06 3LZ	★★★★☆	16.8.23	Incredible engine and chassis makeover, but the price has to be right.	3.1	2.4	1670	26.1	-

CITROEN

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ami Colour	★★⯪☆☆	11.1.23	Cleverly conceived but hard to recommend, given its limited capabilities.	-	-	471	-	39
ë-C3 Max	★★★⯪☆	30.4.25	Predictable limitations but also plenty of usability, space and cheer for the money.	10.7	10.3	1479	2.8	-
C3 Aircross Puretech 110 Flair	★★★⯪☆	7.3.18	Practical small crossover isn't outstanding to drive but is likeable nonetheless.	11.5	10.7	1159	39.5	-
C4 Puretech 130 Shine Plus Auto	★★★☆☆	26.5.21	Has rational and irrational appeal but lacks a fine-tuned execution.	9.5	9.2	1320	56.4	-
ë-C4 X Shine	★★★⯪☆	3.5.23	EV motoring done differently, with value, but its successes are qualified.	9.7	8.8	1623	-	162
C5 Aircross BlueHDi 180 Flair Plus	★★★⯪☆	13.2.19	Attractive and interesting, although its style is better than its substance.	9.0	8.5	1540	47.8	-
C5 X Puretech 180 Shine Plus	★★★★☆	28.9.22	Good value and comfy, this is the kind of car that Citroën should be making.	7.8	7.1	1502	47.8	-

CUPRA

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Born 204PS 58kWh V3	★★★⯪☆	6.7.22	As good as the family hatchback EV class gets in places but not as good as it could be.	6.7	6.2	1794	-	220
Born VZ First Edition	★★★★☆	9.10.24	An already fine electric car's driver appeal is lifted but not transformed.	5.4	4.2	1996	3.5	269
Leon Estate 310PS VZ3	★★★★☆	8.9.21	Fiercely quick and dependable but pulls the heartstrings only lightly.	4.9	4.3	1707	40.1	-
Leon 2.0 TSI 245PS VZ2	★★★★☆	27.7.22	Brilliantly rounded hot hatch shines in its simplest spec.	5.9	4.7	1468	43.4	-
Ateca 2.0 TSI 4Drive DSG	★★★⯪☆	23.1.19	Hot crossover is objectively impressive but lacks true driver reward.	4.9	4.4	1615	36.7	-
Formentor 2.0 TSI 4Drive VZ2 DSG	★★★★⯪	3.2.21	Versatile, interesting, rewarding. One of the best fast crossovers yet.	5.1	4.3	1583	36.4	-

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Terramar 2.0 TSI 4Drive VZ2	★★★★☆	18.6.25	Hottish cousin of the Volkswagen Tiguan is likeable but a bit too sensible.	5.6	5.1	1737	35.0	-
Tavascan V1	★★★☆☆	5.2.25	Electric SUV is competent but not very compelling or memorable.	6.0	5.0	2129	3.2	246

DACIA

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Sandero Stepway TCe 90 Prestige	★★★★☆	28.4.21	Compromised in surprisingly few areas.	11.9	11.9	1096	54.1	-
Jogger TCe 110 Comfort	★★★★⯪	20.4.22	Superb versatility, outstanding value and so likeable with it.	11.0	11.0	1267	48.5	-
Duster Hybrid 140 Journey	★★★★⯪	27.11.24	Notably improved yet barely any pricier.	9.7	8.7	1413	40.2	-
Bigster Hybrid 155 Journey	★★★★☆	11.6.25	Big Duster in name, big Duster in nature.	8.9	7.8	-	47.5	-

DS

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
3 Crossback Puretech 155 Prestige	★★★☆☆	10.7.19	No design smash hit. Short on perceived quality and dynamic polish.	8.8	8.3	1205	48.6	-
4 E-Tense 225 Performance Line+	★★★⯪☆	29.6.22	High price and a list of niggles keep this family hatchback away from the top.	7.4	6.0	1706	44.7	26
7 Crossback Puretech 225 Prestige	★★★⯪☆	19.9.18	DS's first SUV is a competent but slightly bland addition to the class.	8.6	7.0	1616	44.6	-
7 E-Tense 4x4 360 La Première	★★★⯪☆	26.4.23	More focused and makes subtle gains, but its powertrain and ride frustrate.	5.7	4.6	1956	36.6	29
9 E-Tense 225 Performance Line Plus	★★★⯪☆	2.2.22	Posh saloon is alternative and devoted to its luxury remit but no show-stopper.	8.6	7.1	1886	44.7	20

FERRARI

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
296 GTB	★★★★★	21.12.22	Stellar modern-era Ferrari supercar has an unrivalled breadth of talent.	2.7	1.9	1648	37.8	15
SF90 Stradale	★★★★☆	3.11.21	Sets the performance benchmark but isn't a track-handling great.	2.5	1.8	1698	24.4	16

FIAT

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
500 Twinair Lounge	★★★⯪☆	24.11.10	Characterful and stylish, but its real-world economy lets it down.	11.7	13.0	1070	42.1	-
500e 42kWh Icon	★★★★☆	26.1.22	More than just an electric city car and a welcome return to form.	8.1	7.7	1365	-	142

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
600e La Prima ★★★⯪☆ 27.3.24 Electric crossover is decent value and easy to drive but otherwise a bit easy to overlook.	8.8	7.7	1587	-	173
FORD					
Focus 1.5 Ecoboost 182PS ST-Line X ★★★★⯪ 20.2.19 Better to drive and look at than before and impressively good value.	8.9	7.8	1417	43.8	-
Focus ST ★★★★☆ 11.9.19 Big on character and performance but not quite truly immersive.	6.1	4.9	1433	40.7	-
Puma 1.0T 125PS MHEV Titanium ★★★★⯪ 25.3.20 The driver's car the compact crossover class has been crying out for and more besides.	10.0	9.6	1260	50.0	-
Puma Gen-E Select ★★★★☆ 4.6.25 Ford finally brings engagement to the small EV class.	7.2	7.2	-	3.4	179
Puma ST ★★★★☆ 24.3.21 Well judged, versatile and fun. The jacked-up hot hatch done well.	7.2	6.2	1301	41.5	-
Explorer Extended Range Premium RWD ★★★⯪☆ 23.10.24 Electric family crossover is better to drive than rivals, but at a cost.	5.8	4.8	2067	2.9	262
Kuga 2.5 PHEV ST-Line ★★★⯪☆ 24.6.20 Good value and potentially frugal, but this SUV has more to give.	-	-	1844	-	-
Mustang Mach-E Extended Range RWD ★★★★☆ 23.6.21 Worthy of the name? Perhaps not, but it's still impressive and likeable.	6.8	5.6	2130	-	-
Mustang Mach-E GT AWD ★★★☆☆ 27.4.22 Has its moments but lacks the dynamism of a typical fast Ford.	4.2	3.5	2298	-	-
Mustang Dark Horse ★★★⯪☆ 20.11.24 Brimming with character but more compromised than many of its forebears.	4.5	3.5	1853	26.1	-
Tourneo Courier 1.0 Ecoboost Titanium ★★★⯪☆ 10.7.24 Has some Ford-typical star quality but not enough for the money.	10.8	10.6	1426	47.4	-
Tourneo Connect 1.5 Ecoboost PHEV Titanium ★★★⯪☆ 2.7.25 PHEV power is a smart choice in this versatile, though expensive, utility MPV.	9.7	9.5	1876	40.3	64
Transit Custom L2H1 320 2.0 EcoBlue 150PS Limited ★★★★☆ 8.5.24 Likely to remain the default commercial vehicle, despite a high price.	12.1	11.8	1971	38.8	-
Ranger 2.0TD EcoBlue 205PS Wildtrak ★★★★⯪ 14.6.23 Pick-up truck is practical, car-like to drive and generally hard to fault.	9.8	9.9	2348	36.6	-
GENESIS					
G70 2.2 CRDi Luxury Line ★★★⯪☆ 10.11.21 Likeable left-field choice struggles to threaten the establishment.	7.2	6.7	1751	60.4	-
Electrified G80 ★★★⯪☆ 12.10.22 Electric limo doesn't quite hit the mark like its Kia and Hyundai platform-mates.	4.4	4.0	2349	-	272
GV60 Sport Plus ★★★★☆ 24.8.22 Handsome, fast, sophisticated electric crossover is the best Genesis yet.	3.8	3.1	2192	-	220
GV80 3.0D Luxury 5-Seater ★★★⯪☆ 15.9.21 Rich, spacious and comfortable but not a world-class luxury SUV yet.	6.7	6.6	2217	45.0	-
GWM					
Ora Funky Cat 48kWh First Edition ★★⯪☆☆ 1.2.23 Electric hatch is decent value and has funky looks but is a mediocre experience overall.	7.7	7.2	1580	-	154
HONDA					
E Advance ★★★⯪☆ 26.8.20 More than just a pretty face in the EV crowd but its limited range is an issue.	7.9	-	1535	-	110
Jazz 1.5 i-MMD Hybrid EX ★★★⯪☆ 7.10.20 Eminently practical, impressively frugal and pretty joyless to drive.	9.6	10.0	1248	57.0	-
Civic Type R ★★★★☆ 10.9.25 Road-legal touring car vibe perfected. Sensational – if a little serious.	5.4	4.5	1417	37.4	-
HR-V e:HEV Advance Style ★★★⯪☆ 24.11.21 Fine ergonomics and big on superficial charm but leaves us cold.	9.2	9.3	1397	43.2	-
e:Ny1 Advance ★★★☆☆ 1.11.23 EV is charming in some ways but has too little substance to justify the price.	8.6	6.9	1756	-	211
HYUNDAI					
i10 1.2 MPi Premium ★★★★☆ 15.4.20 Smallest Hyundai regains leadership of the city car class.	12.3	12.9	999	52.5	-
Inster 49kWh Long Range 02 ★★★⯪☆ 24.9.25 Dinky looks but a surprisingly grown-up and versatile ownership experience.	9.6	8.8	-	3.3	179
i20 1.0 T-GDi 100 48V SE Connect ★★★⯪☆ 24.2.21 Steady gains for a versatile runabout still lacking some personality.	9.7	10.1	1065	63.5	-
i20 N ★★★★⯪ 25.8.21 N division's finest car to date. A serious hot hatch with real dynamic polish.	6.1	5.4	1231	50.6	-
Ioniq 6 RWD Ultimate ★★★⯪☆ 7.6.23 Usable, rangy and innovative EV let down by cabin packaging and ride.	7.2	6.2	2006	-	272
Kona 1.0 120PS Advance ★★★★☆ 6.9.23 Hyundai brings some cheer, value and space to the compact crossover class.	10.4	10.3	1352	50.4	-
Tucson 1.6 T-GDi Hybrid Premium ★★★★☆ 17.3.21 Tucson shows that Hyundai can do both style and substance.	7.6	6.2	1612	47.7	-
Ioniq 5 N ★★★★★ 7.8.24 A little big and heavy, but compelling like no other EV to date.	3.5	2.7	2221	-	224
Santa Fe Hybrid 4WD Premium ★★★★☆ 16.10.24 A superb lounge on wheels, but let down by its powertrain.	7.9	7.5	2007	32.9	-
Nexo ★★★⯪☆ 12.6.19 Impressive effort that heads in the right direction for hydrogen fuel cell cars.	9.6	9.7	1852	-	-
INEOS					
Grenadier 3.0 T Fieldmaster ★★★⯪☆ 20.9.23 Unquestionably a serious proposition but maybe lacking in innovation.	8.0	8.1	2682	20.9	-
JAECOO					
7 SHS 2WD Luxury ★★⯪☆☆ 9.4.25 Chinese PHEV SUV is efficient and keenly priced but has too many usability flaws.	7.3	6.4	1814	35.0	41
JAGUAR					
XF Sportbrake 300PS R-Sport AWD ★★★⯪☆ 17.4.19 Estate is built on enthusiast values but in need of a wider update.	6.6	6.2	1727	36.8	-
E-Pace D180 AWD SE ★★★⯪☆ 11.4.18 Misses the mark for keen drivers but is a desirable SUV nevertheless.	9.9	10.5	1768	49.2	-
I-Pace EV400 S ★★★★⯪ 12.9.18 Jaguar's landmark car strikes a heavy blow to Tesla's luxury EV monopoly.	4.5	3.5	2236	-	-
F-Pace SVR ★★★★⯪ 24.7.19 Broad-batted and can vividly thrill but hasn't forgotten its SUV roots.	4.1	3.5	2070	29.4	-
F-Pace 400e R-Dynamic HSE ★★★★⯪ 1.12.21 Facelift hits the mark. Electrification is a mixed but creditable success.	5.1	4.6	2264	-	24
F-Type P575 R AWD Coupé ★★★★☆ 29.4.20 The same likeable bruiser behind those prettier features.	-	-	1743	-	-
JEEP					
Avenger Electric Summit ★★★⯪☆ 24.1.24 Not perfect but successfully takes Jeep in a fresh direction.	8.3	6.9	1601	-	172
Compass 2.0 Multijet II 140 4WD Limited ★★★⯪☆ 3.10.18 Pricey, pokey, gruff Jeep is a long shot for SUV market success.	11.0	11.5	1540	44.8	-
Compass 4xe S ★★★☆☆ 16.2.22 Not without niche appeal but off the pace in too many respects.	6.4	5.7	1872	46.9	22
Renegade 2.0 Multijet II 140 4WD Limited ★★★⯪☆ 28.10.15 Charmingly authentic but also pricey and rather rough and ready.	10.8	11.2	1502	52.6	-
Renegade 4xe Trailhawk ★★★☆☆ 30.6.21 Electrified Jeep has some charm but is typically rough and ready.	6.7	5.6	1816	39.4	21
Wrangler 2.2 Multijet II Overland ★★★★☆ 10.4.19 Off-road icon is now more competent on it.	9.0	9.1	2122	37.6	-
KGM					
Tivoli XLV ELX Auto ★★★☆☆ 14.9.16 Practical, well-priced crossover is competent but far from compelling.	12.0	12.6	1469	-	-
Torres 1.5T K40 AWD ★★⯪☆☆ 4.6.25 Cheerful enough, although not as cheap or capable as we had hoped.	11.3	12.0	1661	35.0	-
KIA					
Picanto 1.0 MPI 2 ★★★⯪☆ 11.9.24 No great advance for the breed but likeable, capable and still here.	13.4	13.9	985	51.4	-
Ceed 1.6 CRDi 115bhp 2 ★★★★☆ 29.8.18 Big step up in the family hatchback class is a watershed moment for Kia.	9.9	9.6	1411	70.3	-
Proceed 1.4 T-GDi GT-Line S ★★★⯪☆ 27.2.19 Alluring and interesting but not quite as special to drive as it looks.	9.5	8.9	1475	42.6	-

TOP 3

BEST PHEV COMPANY CARS

1 BMW 530e

2 Skoda Superb iV

3 Mercedes-Benz C300e

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

Road tests revisited

1988 SKODA 136 RAPID COUPE

The basic design of this rear-engined, rear-driven Czech dated back to the early 1960s, but the new sporty 136 version is “not only excellent value for money but thoroughly entertaining as well”, with progressive oversteer and now predictable, fun handling.

Price £4522
Engine 4 cyls in line, 1289cc, petrol
Power 62bhp at 5000rpm
Torque 74lb ft at 3000rpm
Weight 1120kg
0-60mph 14.9sec
0-80mph 33.3sec
Top speed 92mph
Economy 30.6mpg

1960 MORRIS MINI-TRAVELLER

BMC turns its hugely popular miniature saloon into an estate, mechanically almost identical but extended at the rear and given decorative woodwork. Slightly more practical than the old Minor 1000 Traveller but rolls more than the regular Mini.

Price £623
Engine 4 cyls in line, 848cc, petrol
Power 34bhp at 5500rpm
Torque 44lb ft at 2900rpm
Weight 826kg
0-30mph 7.8sec
0-60mph 33.8sec
Top speed 69mph
Economy 38.4mpg

READ FULL ROAD TEST FOR FREE*

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Xceed 1.4 T-GDi First Edition	★★★½☆	20.11.19	Looks good and drives well yet lacks some practicality and polish.	9.3	8.7	1452	46.8	-
Soul EV Urban	★★★½☆	5.7.23	Not actually that cheap but likeable and complete.	8.0	8.3	1569	-	147
Niro EV 3	★★★★☆	7.9.22	A good family EV made better, despite some missed opportunities.	6.9	5.6	1739	-	246
EV3 81.4kWh GT-Line	★★★★☆	31.12.24	New-era Niro is rationally compelling although it’s not a game-changer.	7.2	6.4	1858	2.6	265
Sportage 1.6 HEV 2WD GT-Line S	★★★½☆	15.6.22	Bold family SUV catches the eye but won’t hold your interest to drive.	7.3	6.4	1658	44.8	-
EV6 77.4kWh RWD GT-Line S	★★★★☆	9.10.24	Not the outstanding EV it once was yet still a likeably bold choice.	7.5	6.3	-	2.9	227
EV6 GT	★★★½☆	4.10.23	Lots of pace and usability for the money but not enough driver appeal.	3.6	2.7	2161	-	209
Sorento 1.6 HEV T-GDi AWD 2	★★★½☆	20.1.21	Lacks polish, although its abundant utility appeal and value shine through.	8.5	7.9	2006	43.3	-
EV9 GT-Line S	★★★★☆	31.1.24	Style, space, versatility and range for a more reasonable price than rivals.	5.1	4.6	2660	-	220

LAMBORGHINI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Huracán Performante	★★★★½	11.10.17	Breathtaking track makeover brings it close to greatness.	2.9	2.0	1590	22.4	-
Huracán Evo RWD	★★★★½	20.5.20	Finest driver’s car Lamborghini makes is also the most attainable.	-	-	1389	-	-
Revuelto	★★★★½	4.12.24	New-era V12 Lamborghini is an extraordinary statement of intent.	2.5	1.7	1960	24.1	6
Urus	★★★★☆	3.7.19	Italy’s latest ‘mostro’ has a driving experience to blow your mind.	3.3	2.8	2285	28.5	-

LAND ROVER

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Range Rover Evoque P300e R-Dynamic HSE	★★★★½	10.2.21	A better plug-in compact SUV. Expensive but slick and luxurious.	6.8	5.9	2158	32.7	24
Discovery Sport D180 AWD SE	★★★★☆	8.1.20	Off-road fidelity and character outweigh a lacklustre powertrain.	10.3	10.5	2145	47.5	-
Discovery TD6 HSE Luxury	★★★★½	12.4.17	A proper Land Rover, modernised, refined and as likeable as ever.	8.7	8.8	2230	-	-
Range Rover Velar D240 HSE	★★★½☆	30.8.17	Stylish, advanced and accomplished but in need of a better powertrain.	9.3	9.0	2089	48.2	-
Defender 110 P400 X	★★★★½	13.5.20	World-class capability. Brilliant on and off road – at a price.	-	-	2388	-	-
Defender 110 P635 Octa Edition 1	★★★★½	30.4.25	Outrageous, unnecessary and totally awe-inspiring.	4.6	3.7	2717	22.1	-
Range Rover Sport D300 Dynamic SE	★★★★½	2.11.22	Deeply appealing and deeply accomplished, with a price to match.	7.2	6.6	2511	42.5	-
Range Rover Sport SV Edition One	★★★½☆	28.8.24	More capable than most rivals, but others are more compelling.	3.9	5.1	2546	28.9	-
Range Rover D350 HSE	★★★★½	13.7.22	A fantastically well-isolated luxury car and fully paid-up capable 4x4.	6.3	6.0	2667	35.9	-
Range Rover P550e Autobiography	★★★★☆	9.4.25	A unique and enthralling character that brings added refinement in PHEV form.	4.9	4.0	2979	26.6	44

LEXUS

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
LBX FWD Premium Plus Design	★★★½☆	29.5.24	Crossover convinces as a small premium car, but only just.	8.4	8.4	1306	45.2	-
NX 350h AWD Premium Plus Pack	★★★★☆	16.3.22	Interesting, refined and efficient, although not as polished as the best.	7.1	6.7	1812	44.7	-
RX 500h F Sport	★★★½☆	22.3.23	Classy and luxurious, but that might not be enough for keener drivers.	6.1	5.5	2088	31.7	-
ES 300h Takumi	★★★½☆	6.2.19	Boldly styled, economical saloon has a singularly rational but dry character.	8.7	7.6	1742	48.8	-
RC F Ultimate Edition	★★★½☆	6.11.24	Bellows in some ways, whispers in others. A little flawed but never dull or boring.	4.7	3.8	1733	30.1	-
LM 350h AWD Takumi	★★★☆☆	7.2.24	MPV is a fascinating luxury-market curio but no threat to the old-school limo.	8.6	8.2	2368	40.5	-

LOTUS

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Emira V6 First Edition	★★★★½	2.4.25	The British sports car is alive, well and expensive.	4.4	4.0	1493	29.0	-
Emeya 600 GT	★★★★☆	28.5.25	A good electric saloon and a good Lotus.	4.1	2.8	2478	2.4	218
Eletre R	★★★½☆	24.7.24	There’s plenty to like about the new Lotus but little sign of the old Lotus.	3.1	2.2	2682	-	216
Evija	★★★★☆	30.7.25	Mind-blowingly fast and intense, with some defining digital inhibitions.	2.8	1.9	1906	2.2	122

MASERATI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Grecale Trofeo	★★★½☆	18.10.23	A belting engine but high-priced and not the best-driving Grecale.	3.6	3.2	2097	33.6	-
Levante S Granlusso	★★★½☆	8.5.19	Better engine improves the class’s curate’s egg but can’t redeem it.	5.1	4.5	2232	23.7	-
Granturismo Trofeo	★★★½☆	11.9.24	An appealing grand tourer that lacks some sophistication for the price.	3.6	3.1	-	33.0	-
Granturismo Folgore	★★★½☆	26.2.25	Assured and likeable but could only ever be bought with the heart – even sans V8.	2.9	2.3	2358	2.3	183
MC20 Cielo	★★★★☆	16.10.24	Dynamic iconoclast, old-school charmer, occasional GT. A unique supercar.	4.0	2.8	1783	29.6	-

MAZDA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
2 1.5 Skyactiv-G 90PS SE-L Nav	★★★★☆	22.4.15	The go-to option for keen drivers is also a convincing all-rounder.	10.4	11.0	1050	-	-
3 2.0 Skyactiv-X 181PS GT Sport	★★★★☆	6.11.19	Sweet to drive and great to behold, but the Skyactiv-X engine is no knockout.	9.1	9.1	1425	57.0	-
MX-30 145PS GT Sport Tech	★★★½☆	10.3.21	Has smart looks and a plush interior, but the first Mazda EV deserved more.	9.1	8.6	1663	-	-
CX-30 2.5 e-Skyactiv G Exclusive-Line	★★★★☆	19.2.25	Alternative powertrain is a credit to this voluble, unconventional compact SUV.	7.6	7.6	1422	45.2	-
CX-5 2.2D 150PS 2WD Sport Nav	★★★★☆	28.6.17	Still moderately left of field but now likeable in greater proportions.	9.4	9.2	1620	53.9	-
CX-60 e-Skyactiv D 3.3 RWD Exclusive-Line	★★★½☆	10.5.23	Old-school in all the best ways, but the ride is difficult to overlook.	7.6	7.2	1893	52.3	-
MX-5 1.5 SE-L Nav	★★★★½	2.9.15	An outstanding and usable sports car at an outstanding price.	8.4	7.9	1050	-	-

McLAREN

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
720S	★★★★★	24.5.17	Sufficiently complete and exciting to dominate rivals and hugely fast.	2.9	2.0	1419	24.2	-
750S	★★★★☆	19.6.24	McLaren’s mainstay is a bit of a wild child – at times, to its own cost.	2.9	2.0	1412	28.8	-
Artura	★★★★½	19.10.22	Brilliantly packaged, invitingly poised and wise use of electrification.	3.2	2.1	1552	32.9	17

*For three weeks from publication date

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Artura Spider	★★★★½	6.11.24	Artura finds extra form in convertible guise.	3.1	2.2	1618	27.2	17
GT	★★★½☆	27.1.21	Plenty of pace and purity, less GT-typical usability and refinement.	3.3	2.3	1580	34.2	

MERCEDES-AMG

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
A45 S 4Matic+ Plus	★★★★½	4.3.20	AMG brings its hottest hatch yet to life without harming usability.	4.1	3.3	1661	41.5	-
C63 S E Performance 4Matic+ Night Edition Premium Plus Estate	★★★☆☆	31.7.24	Fascinating engineering feat falls flat as an exciting super-estate.	3.3	2.8	2217	27.1	7.1
CLE 53 4Matic+ Night Edition Premium Plus	★★★★☆	20.8.25	Appealing GT leaves something on the table.	3.9	3.5	2012	26.9	-
GT 63 4Matic+ 4-Door Coupé	★★★★½	13.3.19	AMG defies physics with a four-door GT that handles beautifully.	3.3	2.7	2135	30.1	-
GT 63 S E Performance 4-Door Coupé	★★★½☆	21.6.23	Rocket-ship GT with astonishing powertrain but still lacks driver reward.	2.9	2.5	2339	23.9	6
EQS 53 4Matic+ Night Edition	★★★★☆	8.6.22	Good but doesn't quite live up to its spectacular on-paper potential.	3.6	2.8	2673	-	259
S63 E Performance Night Edition	★★★★☆	2.10.24	Prodigiously quick, confoundingly slick in its handling, but has a coarseness to it.	3.5	2.7	2666	26.1	-
GLE 53 4Matic+ Premium Plus	★★★½☆	14.10.20	Remarkable dynamic versatility but lacks some driver appeal.	5.4	4.9	2471	29.4	-
SL 63 4Matic+ Premium Plus	★★★½☆	26.7.23	Stonking V8 doesn't quite redeem a car of as many sacrifices as gains.	3.5	2.8	1939	26.2	-
GT 43 Premium Coupé	★★★★☆	3.9.25	Less grunt with more grin for less outlay – but a rear-driven GT 55 would be better still.	4.5	3.7	-	36.6	-
GT 63 4Matic+ Premium Plus Coupé	★★★½☆	14.8.24	Fearsomely quick and truly usable but less lovable than before.	3.1	2.7	1972	30.7	-

MERCEDES-BENZ

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
A200 AMG Line Executive	★★★★☆	24.5.23	Significant progress for a keen-handling and efficient premium hatch.	7.8	7.3	1396	59.3	-
A250e AMG Line Premium	★★★☆☆	5.8.20	Falls some way short of a rounded 'premium' driving experience.	6.7	5.4	1665	57.8	-
B180 Sport	★★★★☆	3.4.19	In an ever-shrinking niche, this compact MPV deserves consideration.	8.4	8.3	1405	51.3	-
C300e AMG Line	★★★★½	4.5.22	Long-range hybrid tech gives C-Class an outstanding selling point.	5.8	5.1	2005	49.0	48
E220d AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★★☆	3.1.24	An effective blend of convention, comfort, luxury and modernity.	7.2	5.9	1917	65.8	-
E450d Estate Exclusive Premium Plus	★★★★½	19.3.25	Big-hearted diesel has speed, space and opulence. The only car you would ever need.	4.9	4.3	2167	46.1	-
EQE 350+ AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★½☆	4.1.23	Hot on comfort and tech but lacklustre on range, material quality and space.	6.0	5.5	2386	-	262
EQS 450+ Business Class	★★★★☆	7.5.25	Progress has been made, but this limousine still isn't quite the ultimate luxury EV.	5.9	4.9	2608	2.6	248
EQS 450 Business Class SUV	★★★½☆	6.3.24	Ultra-luxurious seven-seater strays confusingly into MPV territory.	5.5	5.2	2899	-	265
S580e L AMG Line Premium Plus Executive	★★★★½	6.4.22	Plug-in S-Class is the best of an otherwise ordinary generation.	5.2	4.2	2530	37.0	45
EQA 250 AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★☆☆	17.11.21	Competent but entirely average. For the money, we expect better.	8.4	7.6	2030	-	200
GLB 220d 4Matic AMG Line Premium	★★★½☆	16.9.20	Smart looking and practical but its identity feels stretched at times.	7.4	7.1	1810	55.4	-
EQB 300 4Matic AMG Line Premium	★★★½☆	18.5.22	A versatile premium EV that doesn't easily command its premium.	7.7	6.8	2235	-	-
GLC 300 4Matic AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★½☆	13.9.23	Shines in places but doesn't notably elevate the GLC proposition.	6.5	6.0	1929	41.2	-
GLS 400d 4Matic AMG Line Premium	★★★½☆	12.2.20	Has much to commend it but not enough to be the S-Class of SUVs.	6.5	6.0	2634	38.2	-
G350d AMG Line	★★★★☆	17.7.19	Customary capability, charm and ego, now with 21st-century luxury.	7.5	7.2	2451	31.3	-
G500 AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★★☆	25.9.24	Anachronistic, iconoclastic and expensive but very hard not to love.	5.1	4.5	-	30.7	-
G580 with EQ Technology	★★★½☆	17.9.25	Electric G-Class has no true raison d'être but is still strangely compelling.	4.5	3.9	3140	1.6	209
CLE 300e AMG Line Premium Plus Coupé	★★★★☆	13.11.24	Electrification brings traditional Merc strengths to a desirable mid-sized coupé.	6.1	5.5	2122	37.1	49

MG

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
3 Hybrid+ Trophy	★★★½☆	12.6.24	No bad vices but lacks a final layer of polish.	6.8	6.2	1311	47.9	-
4 EV Long Range SE	★★★★☆	5.4.23	Good value, useful and fun to drive to boot.	7.1	6.1	1692	-	185
S5 EV Long Range Trophy	★★★★☆	23.7.25	It outstrips expectations for the money, except on range.	6.0	5.1	1723	3.3	217
ZS Hybrid+ Trophy	★★★☆☆	22.1.25	Roomier, cleverer and better-equipped than you would expect for the money.	7.6	6.6	1422	41.5	-

MINI

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
John Cooper Works	★★★★☆	14.5.25	A proper hot hatch let down by a stiff ride and an impenetrable user interface.	5.8	4.5	1363	42.0	-
Countryman C Exclusive	★★★½☆	17.4.24	Spacious but sends mixed messages on family-friendly refinement.	8.7	7.7	1618	46.9	-
Aceman SE Exclusive	★★★½☆	8.1.25	Compact SUV has the usual Mini charm but limited extra grown-up appeal.	6.8	5.7	1756	3.1	162

MORGAN

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Plus Four	★★★½☆	12.8.20	Refreshing and fun in that true Morgan way but lacks a little polish.	5.1	4.3	1013	54.0	-
Supersport	★★★★☆	6.8.25	Quite plainly the most polished Morgan to date yet still charismatic.	3.8	3.1	1180	44.2	-
Super 3	★★★★½	9.11.22	Adds some subtle modernity to the 3 Wheeler's endless giggles.	6.9	5.9	644	43.5	-

NISSAN

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Juke 1.0 DIG-T 117 Tekna	★★★½☆	29.1.20	Impressive in some respects but outstanding in few.	11.9	11.8	1256	46.0	-
Qashqai 1.3 DIG-T 158 Tekna	★★★★☆	28.7.21	Ticks the important family car boxes but its powertrain frustrates.	10.0	9.3	1412	44.9	-
Ariya 87kWh Evolve	★★★½☆	26.10.22	Surprisingly traditional and luxurious although not wholly successful.	8.2	6.4	2109	-	-
X-Trail e-Power e-4orce AWD Tekna	★★★★☆	22.2.23	Capable all-rounder that deals effortlessly with everyday life.	6.6	6.0	1947	33.8	-

OMODA

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
5 1.6 TGDI Comfort	★★½☆☆	20.11.24	Chinese SUV has some promise as a purely rational buy but feels under-developed.	7.4	6.3	1474	38.2	-

PEUGEOT

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
e-208 Allure Premium	★★★★☆	6.5.20	Stylish, drivable, usable, reasonably priced – and the best small EV	-	-	1455	-	-
308 1.2T Puretech 130 GT	★★★★☆	25.5.22	A reminder of the old Peugeot magic. Small, supple and a bit special.	9.5	9.2	1358	55.3	-
408 Hybrid 180 GT e-EAT8	★★★★☆	11.10.23	Novel Peugeot shows an alternative path for the family car.	8.2	7.3	1746	42.1	40
508 BlueHDi 180 S&S GT Auto	★★★★☆	24.10.18	Stylish and likeable but lacking the polish of more premium rivals.	8.8	8.5	1671	52.0	-
508 SW Hybrid 225 S&S Allure e-EAT8	★★★★☆	8.7.20	This is a comfortable car that looks smart and feels classy.	-	-	1720	-	-
508 SW Hybrid4 PSE	★★★★☆	5.5.21	Hits notable handling highs but feels less than sharp elsewhere.	5.7	4.7	1892	44.0	-

TOP 3

BEST ESTATE CARS

1 Volkswagen ID 7 Tourer

2 BMW 3 Series Touring

3 Porsche Taycan Sport Turismo

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

e-2008 GT Line ★★★⯪☆ 30.9.20
Cheaper versions impress; pricier ones won't worry class leaders.
9.5 8.9 1638 - -

e-3008 73kWh Allure ★★★⯪☆ 4.8.24
Electric family SUV is rich, handsome and refined but no technical tour de force.
8.5 7.1 2132 - 219

5008 Hybrid 136 GT ★★★☆☆ 12.2.25
Concept car style can't save the function-follows-form engineering.
9.9 9.4 1736 44.0 -

POLESTAR

2 BST Edition 270 ★★★⯪☆ 12.4.23
A creditable attempt at electric car thrills, although not quite fully formed.
4.5 3.4 2161 - 188

3 Long Range Dual Motor Launch Edition ★★★★☆ 12.2.25
Electric SUV is spacious, attractive and enticing to drive - with a few lapses.
4.6 3.8 2610 2.3 235

4 Long Range Single Motor ★★★☆☆ 24.9.25
Electric crossover is desirable but something of a missed opportunity.
6.8 5.5 2246 2.5 310

PORSCHE

718 Boxster ★★★★⯪ 8.6.16
Better than ever objectively, but at the expense of vital subjective appeal.
5.4 4.3 1395 35.9 -

718 Cayman S ★★★★⯪ 10.8.16
Still the greatest sports coupé out there, even if it doesn't sound like it.
4.8 3.9 1430 - -

TOP 3

BEST DIESEL CARS

1 Skoda Superb

2 BMW X5

3 Volkswagen Golf

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

718 Cayman GT4 RS ★★★★★ 14.9.22
A feast of noise, revs, handling poise and thrills. Incredibly special.
3.9 3.0 1444 27.1 -

911 Carrera S ★★★★⯪ 3.9.25
Supercar quick but gloriously rounded with it.
3.0 2.5 1600 34.5 -

911 Carrera T ★★★★☆ 30.8.23
Sharper 911 has a likeable simplicity but makes key compromises.
4.9 3.8 1456 39.1 -

911 Carrera GTS ★★★★⯪ 5.3.25
Hybrid tech punts barnstorming Carrera into the supercar sphere.
2.8 2.6 1607 34.3 -

911 Turbo S ★★★★⯪ 10.8.22
Has a questionable raison d'être but is engaging and awesomely capable.
2.5 2.0 1640 36.3 -

911 GT3 PDK ★★★★⯪ 11.8.21
Less versatile than some past GT3s but still spectacularly good.
3.4 2.7 1430 29.2 -

911 GT3 RS ★★★★⯪ 22.11.23
Esoteric even by hardcore 911 standards but simply monumental.
3.2 2.5 1476 26.7 -

911 Dakar ★★★★☆ 10.1.24
Rally-raid-themed throwback charms like no other modern 911.
3.3 2.6 1660 36.0 -

911 S/T ★★★★★ 3.7.24
Porsche's GT division alters its recipe to deliver an all-time great.
3.7 2.6 1408 30.9 -

Macan Electric ★★★★☆ 13.8.25
Well rounded in every sense and not without quietly executed driver appeal.
5.2 4.2 2262 3.0 219

Macan Turbo Electric ★★★⯪☆ 19.2.25
Otherwise appealing EV is undone by chassis tech.
3.0 2.5 - 2.1 219

Cayenne S ★★★★⯪ 21.2.24
Rebooted Cayenne impresses and the charming V8 is our pick.
5.0 4.3 2256 28.8 -

Cayenne Turbo ★★★★☆ 5.9.18
As impressive as ever but not quite the driver's car it once was.
3.9 3.4 2307 31.5 -

Cayenne Turbo S E-Hybrid ★★★⯪☆ 27.5.20
Technically impressive but fails to make a convincing case for itself.
- - 2490 - -

Cayenne Turbo GT Coupé ★★★★☆ 20.7.22
Uncompromising rapid SUV is a bit of a monster – but a likeable one.
3.1 2.7 2251 26.1 -

Panamera 4 E-Hybrid ★★★★☆ 22.1.25
Understated plug-in hybrid is a Swiss Army knife super-saloon.
3.8 2.4 2370 30.1 29

Taycan Turbo S ★★★★⯪ 30.10.24
Porsche deftly keeps its superb EV on the boil.
2.6 1.9 2356 2.7 233

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

RENAULT

Clio TCe 100 Iconic ★★★★⯪ 27.11.19
Plusher, smoother, more mature. A car of substance as well as style.
11.6 10.9 1138 56.9 -

4 E-Tech Comfort Range Iconic ★★★★☆ 16.7.25
Charismatic but grown-up, the reborn 4 is a real contender.
8.2 7.5 1493 3.3 182

5 E-Tech Comfort Range Iconic Five ★★★★⯪ 12.3.25
Accomplished and well priced, the 5 changes the affordable EV game.
7.7 7.2 1461 3.1 166

Megane E-Tech Techno ★★★⯪☆ 23.11.22
Likeable and eye-catching, but rivals have moved the EV game on.
6.9 5.4 1688 - 198

Captur TCe 130 S-Edition EDC ★★★⯪☆ 18.3.20
Second-generation Captur should prove popular, but not with this powertrain.
9.4 9.2 1363 53.1 -

Arkana E-Tech Hybrid 145 S-Edition ★★★⯪☆ 13.10.21
Eminently sensible but unspectacular.
11.0 10.1 1365 58.3 -

Scenic E-Tech Iconic Long Range ★★★★☆ 26.6.24
The Scenic finally conforms but does so with style and substance.
8.1 6.3 1916 - 313

Austral E-Tech Iconic Esprit Alpine ★★★⯪☆ 19.7.23
Clever hybrid and pleasant cabin but let down by clumsy dynamics.
8.5 6.9 1696 43.5 -

ROLLS-ROYCE

Ghost Series II Black Badge ★★★★⯪ 25.6.25
Only flirts with sporting appeal, and gives up no Rolls accomplishments in doing so.
4.5 3.6 2576 25.8 -

Phantom ★★★★★ 4.4.18
The world's greatest and finest luxury car is now also the very best.
5.5 4.4 2780 28.4 -

Spectre ★★★★⯪ 20.12.23
Superbly lavish and intoxicatingly refined, if shy of epoch-making.
4.1 3.1 2935 - 245

Cullinan Black Badge ★★★★☆ 19.2.20
Far more likeable to drive than look at, for those who have a use for it.
4.9 4.2 2739 23.6 -

SEAT

Ibiza 1.0 TSI SE Technology ★★★★⯪ 19.7.17
Grown-up supermini shows its rivals how it's done – in most respects.
10.0 10.0 1047 55.6 -

Leon eHybrid FR ★★★⯪☆ 2.12.20
Competent and efficient but verges on being forgettable to drive.
7.2 6.2 1558 46.3 26

Arona 1.0 TSI SE Technology ★★★★☆ 15.11.17
Polished, mature all-rounder has since lost its class-best crown.
10.5 10.7 1149 40.9 -

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

Ateca 1.5 Eco TSI FR Black Edition DSG ★★★☆☆ 25.10.23
Once-appealing Nissan Qashqai rival now shows some signs of neglect.
8.9 8.0 1396 44.4 -

SKODA

Fabia 1.0 TSI 95PS SE Comfort ★★★★⯪ 9.2.22
Comfy, spacious and good value, this supermini is Skoda at its best.
9.9 9.7 1117 58.7 -

Scala SE 1.5 TSI 150PS DSG ★★★⯪☆ 31.7.19
Different from the bigger Octavia but perhaps not by enough.
7.9 7.3 1200 52.9 -

Octavia 2.0 TDI 150PS SE L First Edition Estate DSG ★★★★☆ 2.9.20
Leads the charge to take Skoda upmarket and mostly succeeds.
8.4 8.7 1510 73.0 -

Octavia Estate vRS ★★★★☆ 29.1.25
A fine estate made more engaging rather than a great hot hatch made a bit bigger.
5.9 4.8 - 37.6 -

Superb SE L 2.0 TDI 150PS Estate ★★★★★ 17.7.24
The large, functional estate car modernised in all the right ways.
8.4 8.2 1673 68.7 -

Karoq 2.0 TDI 150PS Scout ★★★⯪☆ 30.1.19
Practical, comfortable Skoda is short on charm and dynamic polish.
8.9 9.6 1629 47.1 -

Elroq 85 Edition ★★★★⯪ 19.3.25
Comfortable, efficient, practical and intuitive; a well-rounded, class-topping EV.
6.1 5.0 2085 3.5 246

Enyaq iV 80 Lounge ★★★★☆ 18.8.21
Practical, rangy, well priced. Hits a sweet spot in the EV market.
8.3 7.8 2098 - 262

SMART

#1 Premium ★★★⯪☆ 8.11.23
Drivability frustrations mar an otherwise agreeable experience.
5.6 4.6 1861 - 229

#3 Premium ★★★⯪☆ 15.5.24
Makings of an interesting alternative EV but let down by the finer details.
5.7 4.9 1832 - 205

SUBARU

Crosstrek 2.0i e-Boxer Touring ★★★⯪☆ 28.2.24
Improved manners for junior off-roader are welcome, if not transformative.
10.4 10.4 1620 45.3 -

Outback 2.5i Lineartronic Touring ★★★⯪☆ 27.9.23
A pretty good answer to a question that only a few people asked.
9.3 8.7 1690 42.8 -

Solterra AWD Touring ★★★☆☆ 15.3.23
A hint of Subaru-typical capability doesn't take this EV quite far enough.
6.7 6.2 2051 - 169

SUZUKI

Across 2.5 PHEV E-Four CVT ★★★★⯪ 7.4.21
Excellent hybrid powertrain makes it one of the best PHEVs around.
6.4 5.8 1966 44.4 48

TESLA

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Model 3 Standard Range Plus	★★★★☆	4.9.19	Wrinkles aside, it offers great electric performance and usability at this price.	5.8	4.7	1633	-	156
Model 3 Long Range	★★★★☆	14.2.24	Packs a real punch. Both updated Model 3s are fine propositions.	4.4	3.4	1846	-	277
Model Y Long Range Rear-Wheel Drive	★★★★☆	27.8.25	Evolution keeps Model Y nicely on the boil – for now.	5.7	4.3	1903	3.2	315
Model S P90D	★★★★½	20.4.16	Great EV, intriguing driver's car. Not quite the perfect luxury GT.	3.5	3.0	2220	-	214
Model S Plaid	★★★½☆	2.8.23	Astonishing pace but not a fully rounded performance saloon.	2.4	1.7	2220	-	301
Model X 90D	★★★★☆	15.2.17	High-rise EV strains under SUV brief but still feels like a history maker.	5.2	4.2	2508	-	147

TOYOTA

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Aygo X Limited Edition	★★★½☆	11.5.22	A mostly very grown-up small car but also an expensive one.	15.6	16.5	974	58.7	-
Yaris 1.5 Hybrid Design	★★★★☆	23.9.20	Grows not only in stature but also in ability and subjective appeal.	9.2	8.8	1140	65.0	-
GR Yaris Circuit Pack	★★★★★	3.3.21	Toyota, on a roll with driver's cars, provides yet another winner.	5.2	5.0	1283	39.2	-
Corolla 2.0 Hybrid Design Touring Sports	★★★★☆	5.6.19	A big step up for Toyota in a vital sector and a better hybrid to boot.	8.5	7.7	1537	52.6	-
Prius Plug-in Design	★★★★☆	23.4.25	Better late than never for best Prius to date.	6.6	5.6	1542	56.1	46
bZ4X AWD Vision	★★★½☆	18.1.23	A decent effort all round but not exceptional in any way.	6.4	5.9	2023	-	208
Land Cruiser 2.8 D-4D 204 Invincible	★★★★☆	21.5.25	Remains supremely tough but now has added kerb appeal and drivability.	10.3	10.3	2503	30.7	-
Mirai Design Premium	★★★★☆	16.6.21	Impressive hydrogen fuel cell car has made strides but remains hamstrung overall.	8.7	8.3	1937	-	-
GR Supra Pro	★★★★☆	14.8.19	Fast, usable and has plenty going for it but leaves us wanting more.	4.4	3.6	1495	39.0	-
Hilux 2.8 D-4D GR Sport	★★★½☆	1.3.23	Gazoo-branded Ford Ranger Raptor rival is formidable but lacks fun factor.	10.0	9.5	2241	32.5	-

VAUXHALL

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Corsa 1.2 Turbo 100PS Ultimate Nav Auto	★★★½☆	22.1.20	Supermini is improved in many ways but lacks the appeal to match its price.	11.2	11.5	1171	51.8	-
Astra 1.2 Turbo 130PS GS Line	★★★½☆	5.10.22	Family hatchback's gentle push upmarket is only a qualified success.	9.9	9.2	1304	55.3	-
Crossland X 1.2 Turbo 130PS Elite	★★★☆☆	7.6.17	Typically practical and well priced, but Vauxhall can do better.	9.8	10.3	1278	54.2	-
Mokka 1.2 Turbo 130PS Elite Nav Premium Auto	★★★½☆	12.5.21	The driving experience sells a brave design effort just a little short.	9.3	9.1	1238	48.6	-
Grandland Hybrid GS	★★★½☆	27.8.25	Spacious, functional, efficient and good value, yet neither grand nor lovely.	9.8	9.3	1623	52.2	-
Combo Life 1.5 Turbo D 100PS Energy	★★★½☆	27.12.18	Usable, spacious and practical, if not very pretty to look at.	14.7	16.2	1552	60.1	-

VOLKSWAGEN

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Polo 1.0 TSI 95PS SE	★★★★½	31.1.18	Brings 'big car' space, class, kit and finish to this class like never before.	10.7	11.2	1145	57.1	-
Polo 2.0 TSI GTI+	★★★★☆	1.8.18	A usable, quick and vastly competent effort but not the most thrilling.	6.7	5.9	1342	46.8	-
Golf 1.5 eTSI 150PS Style DSG	★★★★½	22.7.20	Additional strengths and familiar ones carry it back to the class lead.	8.3	7.8	1330	60.0	-
Golf 1.5 TSI eHybrid Style	★★★★½	23.10.24	New plug-in Golf takes the PHEV hatchback's status to greater heights.	7.2	6.1	1619	46.5	-
Golf GTI	★★★½☆	25.9.24	'Mk8.5' version of hot hatchback is slick and effective but not a big enough step forward.	5.3	4.4	-	47.2	-
Golf R	★★★★☆	14.4.21	Most entertaining distillation of the Golf R formula yet – for a price.	4.4	3.7	1520	43.9	-
ID 3 Pro Performance Life	★★★★☆	31.3.21	Bland but with the substance to further the zero-emissions push.	7.0	6.5	1757	-	145
Arteon eHybrid Elegance Shooting Brake	★★★½☆	9.6.21	Striking PHEV appears radical but upholds Volkswagen's traditions at heart.	7.1	6.0	1783	52.5	-
ID 7 Pro Match	★★★★½	13.3.24	Volkswagen finds some electric form in an unexpected format.	6.1	5.1	2162	-	239
ID 7 GTX Tourer	★★★☆☆	13.8.25	Sporty electric estate is appealing but not the product the GTX brand needs.	5.3	4.6	2353	2.9	241
T-Roc 2.0 TSI 190PS 4Motion SEL DSG	★★★★½	24.1.18	Shows performance verve, dynamic completeness and stylish swagger.	6.7	6.5	1534	37.5	-
T-Roc 1.5 TSI Evo R-Line Cabriolet DSG	★★½☆☆	10.6.20	It brings little worth having to the compact cabriolet niche.	-	-	1540	-	-
Tiguan 1.5 eTSI 150PS R-Line	★★★½☆	22.5.24	Functional and mature, but this isn't the engine or trim we would go for.	9.4	9.2	1606	44.9	-
ID 4 GTX Max	★★★½☆	27.10.21	GTX adds flavour to ID 4 but doesn't reimagine 'GTI' for the EV age.	6.2	5.6	2220	-	200
Touareg 3.0 TDI 4Motion R-Line Tech	★★★½☆	8.8.18	An inoffensive if forgettable bid at a luxury market breakthrough.	7.2	6.6	2292	41.6	-
Touareg 3.0 TSI eHybrid 4Motion Elegance	★★★½☆	5.6.24	It's versatile and likeably unpretentious but won't be a default company car choice.	6.2	5.7	2446	34.1	26
Touran 2.0 TDI 150PS SE Family DSG	★★★★☆	3.2.16	A spacious, refined and classy all-rounder – albeit a slightly bland one.	9.9	9.7	1666	-	-
Multivan 1.4 eHybrid Style	★★★★☆	8.3.23	Latest Volkswagen 'bus combines the best bits of both car and van.	8.4	7.1	2243	37.9	14
ID Buzz 77kWh Style Pro	★★★★☆	8.2.23	It costs plenty but offers versatility and luxury accomplishments.	9.5	9.1	2498	-	185
Grand California 600	★★★½☆	2.1.20	Grandest California is classy but not half as clever as its smaller namesake.	15.8	16.7	3095	28.5	-
Transporter Sportline Black Edition Kombi SWB	★★★☆☆	30.3.22	Not compromised but hardly enhanced by its sporting agenda.	9.1	9.0	2108	39.1	-
Passat eHybrid 204PS Elegance	★★★★☆	13.11.24	Rounded and with good PHEV credentials, but less compelling than its sibling car.	7.2	6.4	1836	44.5	73

VOLVO

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
EX30 Single Motor Extended Range Plus	★★★☆☆	1.5.24	Not enough key strengths – and not enough Volvo pragmatism.	5.7	5.1	1779	-	179
C40 Recharge Twin Ultimate	★★★½☆	13.4.22	A transitional model for Volvo that doesn't go quite far enough.	4.4	3.6	2172	-	194
XC40 D4 AWD First Edition	★★★★½	7.2.18	Wieldy, classy and simple. As good as its bigger siblings, if not better.	8.5	8.5	1735	43.8	-
XC60 D4 AWD R-Design	★★★½☆	5.7.17	The right product at the right time but lacking the right dynamic finish.	8.9	8.9	1836	48.9	-
XC90 B5 AWD Ultra Bright	★★★½☆	2.7.25	Still a mature, versatile and wilfully unspectacular choice.	8.0	7.5	2117	37.0	-
V60 T6 Recharge AWD R-Design	★★★★½	21.9.22	Strong hybrid system gives ageing Volvo a lot of fresh appeal.	4.9	4.3	2036	38.0	51
V90 T6 Recharge AWD R-Design	★★★★½	11.11.20	Hardly revolutionary but exceptionally appealing nonetheless.	5.6	4.9	2109	41.9	-

XPENG

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
G6 RWD Standard Range	★★★½☆	26.2.25	Chinese electric SUV lacks inspiration but has plenty of rational appeal.	6.8	6.2	2067	3.3	208

WHAT'S COMING WHEN

BYD Seal 06 Touring **January 2026**
PHEV offers a 62-mile EV range and a 500-litre boot for £10,000 less than the Skoda Superb iV.

Porsche Cayenne EV **Early 2026**
All-new luxury SUV promises huge performance, delectable handling and a long range.

Xpeng G6 **January 2026**
Chinese electric SUV is updated to handle 451kW, making it the market's fastest-charging EV.

SCAN THE CODE FOR THE FULL LIST

Why I love... CONVOYS

We got a little old convoy, ain't she a beautiful sight…

BY CHARLIE MARTIN

There's a peculiar moment when, driving in formation with your mates, the rush kicks in. No longer are you Joe Bloggs trundling down the motorway. This is much more grandiose. You're Burt Reynolds making a break for the border, Luke Skywalker charging at the Death Star.

No matter how flamboyant the cars, the scenery or the driving, there's just something about a convoy that gets my ticker going. Somehow, sharing in the experience – mundane as it could well be – amplifies its enjoyability several times over. Perhaps a great deal of it comes down to the feeling of safety we humans get from travelling in a pack, no doubt passed down from our prehistoric forebears.

Make-believe motorcades are fun – but watch those following distances

> **"I'd catch a flash of red from his Clio and suddenly all was well"**

I encountered this feeling on a recent drive with colleague Sam Phillips, headed home to London after a hearty lunch at Caffeine & Machine near Winchester. We made quiet, comfortable progress until an almighty storm rolled over the M3. It descended so abruptly and violently that a summer's afternoon almost immediately became winter's eve, obscuring anything more than a few car lengths ahead. I could hardly see, let alone form a coherent thought, as innumerable SUVs and 4x4s kicked off a spray that lashed well above my little Mazda MX-5's canvas roof with a jarring *fwoomp* at every pass. But every 30 seconds, and with each pulse of the big vein in my forehead, I would catch a flash of red from the roof of Phillips' Renault Clio Trophy. Suddenly, all was well.

It was an utterly irrational reaction, for it certainly didn't make the conditions any less perilous. If anything, his Day-Glo paintwork probably worked to distract busy eyes from my jet black, low-slung orb. Yet the knowledge that I wasn't alone in my suffering – through what were easily the worst conditions I've yet endured on the road – provided immediate relief.

Perhaps there's more to it than pure tribalism, though. A convoy typically represents either the start or the end of something great; at least sufficiently so to justify summoning a crowd. From something as simple as a Sunday drive to major milestones like moving a son or daughter to university, there's almost always a positive atmosphere underlying a convoy.

Of course, some restraint must be exercised – particularly when enjoying unfamiliar roads or on the return from a social gathering. Get too comfortable and push the limits too hard and you risk wiping out not just your own car but also those of mates and nearby innocents.

But even in maintaining the required discipline – appointing a level-headed pack leader and taking heed of following distances and environmental dangers – there's a satisfaction to be found. Get it right and you will be in for a whale of a time.

What we did this week

WHEN SILVER IS GOLD

The recent Silverstone 4 Hours was this country's first high-level endurance race since 2019. It wasn't part of the World Endurance Championship but the lesser European Le Mans Series, and the weather forecast was awful, yet my mates and I were among a weekend crowd of 110,000 – a new record. Another showing of Brits' outsized enthusiasm for motorsport – rewarded with chaotic, entertaining action.

KRIS CULMER

NORTHERN EXPOSURE

How great is it that Audi chose to do the big, international launch for its new Q3 up in Scotland? Easy to get to (perhaps less so for the other international media), fantastic roads and stunning scenery. The weather wasn't quite up to Barcelona standards, mind you.

MURRAY SCULLION

LOST AMONG THE STARS

I'm not normally one to struggle to remember where I parked my car, but then I'm very rarely parked among a sea of models from the same brand – and one with a rather limited colour palette. Hence my car hunt at the Polestar Festival at Bicester Motion – held to celebrate the marque's fifth anniversary in the UK – took a bit longer than normal. But I got there in the end…

MARK TISSHAW

AUTOCAR PODCAST

MY WEEK IN CARS

Steve Cropley
Matt Prior

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